University of Alberta

Healthy Adjustment Following a Career-Ending Athletic Injury

by

Matthew Tyler Brown

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Faculty of Physical Education & Recreation

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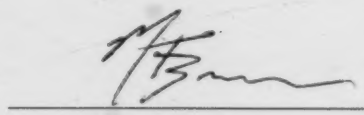

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Healthy Adjustment Following a Career-Ending Athletic Injury* submitted by Matthew Tyler Brown in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how an athlete who has sustained a career-ending injury can achieve healthy adjustment? Healthy adjustment was defined as positive attitudes, behaviours, and healthy affect surrounding life after competition. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four male participants who had sustained career-ending injuries during elite sport careers. Analysis was conducted using a grounded theory approach. Adjustment was found to depend on four factors: 1) the significance of the loss for five elements, 2) the strength of coping resources, 3) the extent to which each element can be filled after sport, and 4) the presence of some direction into which the individual can pour his energy. A model of healthy adjustment was created, which includes recognition of a down period, helpful coping resources (social support and internal), feelings of competence, affiliation, physicality, fulfillment, and the central importance of some new passion or challenge.

Dedication

To my wife Kim.

For your unconditional support and encouragement. I am inspired by your genuineness, devotion, and grace. Everyday, life gets a little better with you by my side.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank the participants in this study. Your stories were filled with wisdom and courage. Your words brought my model to life. Keep your eyes on the future and your feet on the ground.

Thanks John for your support, guidance, and honest feedback that allowed me to conduct quality research.

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Chapter 1:
The Question

This study was designed to investigate the following question: How can an athlete who has sustained a career-ending injury achieve healthy adjustment? Healthy adjustment is defined in this study as positive attitudes, behaviours, and healthy affect surrounding life after athletic competition.

In recent years, a growing body of research has investigated the psychological effects of athletic injury (Brewer, 1994; Leddy, Lambert, & Ogles, 1994; Smith, Scott, & Weise, 1990; Weiss & Troxell, 1986). The literature to date has documented the considerable psychological distress that can result when athletes' participation in their sport is suspended due to injury (Heil, 1993; Smith et. al. 1990; Weiss & Troxell, 1986). Significant levels of depression, anxiety, and anger have been found accompanying the physical pain of injury (Brewer, 1993; Heil, 1993; Leddy, Lambert, & Ogles, 1994; Smith et. al., 1990).

Some efforts have been directed at addressing the psychological needs of the injured athlete since it is believed that injury duration may be a function of psychological response (Weiss & Troxell, 1986). Sport medicine practitioners have taken interest in the psychology of injury since adherence to treatment may depend on effective coping (Duda, Smart, & Tappe, 1989) and research supports the influence of psychological states on healing (Grove, Hanrahan, & Stewart, 1990).

Other interested parties include coaches and team psychologists since performance may suffer following injury if the psychological effects have not been addressed (Kolt & Kirkby, 1994). Confidence, self-esteem, and relationships with teammates can all be affected by injury. Minimizing these effects can serve to reduce disruptions in performance upon return to competition.

Beyond these treatment adherence and performance considerations lies the athlete whose injury precludes further participation in his sport. Injuries such as severe muscle, tendon, and ligament tears, repeat head injuries, nerve and spinal cord damage routinely threaten prospects of returning to competitive sport (across several different sports). Very little research has asked the question "How can an athlete who has sustained a *career-ending injury* cope with the trauma of this experience?".

The focus in the literature on the athlete who is expected to return to competition raises the question of why the 'terminal' case not been sufficiently addressed. Perhaps the athlete who is leaving the sport is no longer considered a primary concern of the team or organization. After all, when resources are limited, they tend to be allotted to those areas that promise the greatest 'returns'. An athlete who is leaving the sport (as a competitor) can no longer contribute to team goals and objectives. As such, many athletes are left to fend for themselves in a process that may well exceed any challenge that they faced in the arena of competition (Thomas & Ermler, 1988).

In the next chapter of this text, I will review the literature addressing career-ending injury both directly and indirectly. I will then discuss studies examining psychological effects of such injuries. Finally, I will describe and draw implications from models of psychological response to athletic injury which are relevant to terminal injury.

The chapter following the literature review will outline a study that was designed to investigate the experience of the career-ending injury. Special consideration was given to the role of identity in this transitional process. The fourth chapter will present the results and the model of healthy adjustment that was created. The fifth and final chapter will discuss the implications of the findings and future directions. It will be explored in this chapter whether those athletes who have taken steps to rebuild a healthy identity following their injury are the same athletes who have gone on to pursue other rewarding directions with their lives (related to their sport or otherwise).

Chapter 2:

Literature Review

While the literature addressing career-ending injury is not plentiful, some work has been done which provides a valuable framework for investigating the phenomenon. This chapter summarizes the literature relevant to the psychological response to career-ending injury. Models of psychological response to injury which are relevant to career termination and subsequent adjustment are also examined.

Psychological Response to Career-Ending Injury

The significance of the career-ending injury to the subsequent well-being of the athlete was raised by Kleiber, Greendorfer, Blinde, and Samdahl (1987). Their study found that while success in the last years of involvement was not predictive of life satisfaction following retirement, those athletes who sustained a career-ending injury reported significantly lower life satisfaction. This study pointed to the career-ending injury as a phenomenon deserving special attention since its occurrence is not uncommon.

In a study examining retirement from sport, Blinde and Stratta (1992) found that emotional adjustment is particularly problematic for those who have involuntary and unanticipated exits from sport. Participants in this study claimed that the experience caused significant trauma and disruption in their lives. The exit was in many cases equated with "death and dying". Although the participants in the study were either cut or had their programs cut, career-ending injury creates both unanticipated and involuntary exit from

sport. It was concluded that such athletes may need special assistance with their transition.

Sinclair and Orlick (1993) attempted to determine what made positive transition out of sport possible. Those athletes who had the smoothest transitions from sport tended to have achieved their sport-related goals. Unfortunately for the athlete whose exit is dictated by injury, this is less likely to be the case. This may also help to explain the adjustment difficulties that career-ending injury may precipitate. Results also suggested that those athletes who had adjustment problems felt incompetent outside of sport. This issue will be addressed in the results of the current study.

Coakley (1983) emphasized the importance of social factors following retirement from sport. He reviewed the research on retirement of high level athletes (whose time commitment and performance standards were 'relatively high'). He suggested that sport retirement is not an inevitable source of stress, identity crisis, or adjustment problems. He insisted that while retirement may be the stage of stress and trauma, it is actually shaped by other factors such as socio-economic status, sources of social and emotional support, gender, race, age, etc. Therefore, it is not the retirement itself that is problematic, but rather the context in which that retirement takes place. The patterns that appear to be most predictive of adjustment problems include: (a) sport careers that restrict the development of credentials and attributes necessary for normal development and coping; (b) relationships restricted to other athletes or those involved in sport; (c) families who have provided little social or emotional support for activities outside of sport; (d) backgrounds with little access to role models or activities outside of sport; and (e) lack of material resources and social contacts limiting career and leisure opportunities.

The key to healthy adjustment, according to Coakley (1983), is a diversity of background, relationships, interests, and expectations. He pointed to the post-retirement conditions as the problem in transition, rather than the detachment from the role and identity of 'athlete'. It should be acknowledged that the social patterns identified above

represent a vital piece of the puzzle when explaining transition out of sport. However, one should be cautioned not to downplay the importance of athletic identity in this transition process.

Brewer (1993) demonstrated the relationship between athletic identity and depression following injury. Athletes whose identities relied strongly or exclusively on athletic participation were found to score higher on measures of depression. Following years of internal reinforcers and external evaluation associated with sport participation, such an identity can develop in many elite athletes (Gati, 1986). Although not all athletes develop unidimensional identities, it is fair to suggest that a career-ending injury will represent an identity threat to some degree. It is, in turn, appropriate to address the effects that the injury has had on an athlete's identity. As mentioned earlier, a career-ending injury may be perceived as "death" to the athlete. This loss of one's sense of self may be an issue of primary significance to certain athletes. Resolution of this role confusion and damage to the self-concept may well allow athletes to reconstruct their identity to better suit their future and circumstances.

Grove, Lavallee, and Gordon (1997) conducted a study reinforcing the role of athletic identity in transitions out of competitive sport. They found that those athletes with strong and exclusive identification with the athletic role tended to engage in less post-athletic career exploration/planning and had more anxiety associated with this process than those athletes with a weaker athletic identity. This anxiety would likely be amplified for an athlete who has been thrust into retirement following an injury. The importance of identity is highlighted in the models that address psychological response to injury.

Grove, Lavallee, and Gordon's (1997) study also examined the types of coping strategies used by athletes in transition out of sport. Their sample of athletes used a combination of emotion-focused, problem-focused, and avoidance-oriented strategies that included acceptance, positive reinterpretation, planning, active coping, mental disengagement, and seeking social support.

A more recent study by Grove, Lavallee, and Gordon (1998) highlights the importance of account-making in retirement. In short, if retiring athletes have positive experiences in which they are able to confide with someone who is empathetic, compassionate, and non-judgmental, they will be able to clarify their thoughts and feelings about the loss of sport and then move on to adaptive and constructive behaviours. However, if attempts to disclose are met judgmentally, with denial and without feedback, individuals may perseverate at a stage of psychological distress and distorted thought. In addition, Grove et. al. (1998) identified a number of negative psychological consequences associated with retirement, including withdrawal of rewards (need to find new way of earning a living), loss of direction for time and energy, threat to self-image, lost feelings of joy, absorption, and accomplishment, and loss of social environment.

Parker (1994) conducted a qualitative study looking at the transition experiences of former major college football players. She concluded that these athletes need a forum for expressing unresolved feelings and emotions, in order to vent and clarify them. This recommendation is consistent with those of a previous retirement study. Baillie (1992) suggested that emphasis be placed on affective concerns when dealing with an athlete after the retirement (in this case due to injury) has occurred. This implies that fears and frustrations of the athlete must be worked through before a functional consideration of life after sport can occur. Only then can the individual focus on the development of new career options and an attitude that promotes the opportunities of retirement rather than just the losses. Baillie encouraged a pre-retirement intervention that will prepare athletes for their inevitable retirement and the emotional and functional implications thereof.

Kleiber and Brock (1994) conducted a qualitative study which determined that career-ending injury represented a significant threat to identity, self-esteem, and physical experience. The injury is described as a loss of the "glorified self" due to the prestige and excitement associated with college sport. The study looked at the 'illness narrative' of the athlete, with the objective of providing the health care professional with a greater understanding of the lived experience of the injured athlete.

The models of psychological response to injury which are of particular relevance to the career-ending injury are described in the section below. While other models exist which address psychology of injury and recovery, the models below were selected based on their pertinence to the research question raised in this study.

The Models of Psychological Response to Injury

Life-Historical Models

Life-historical models look at the injury within the context of the athlete's whole life. Heyman (1987) used such an approach to discuss the counselling of athletes. He used Erikson's (1959; 1968) theoretical framework as it is highly relevant to an athlete's development. According to Erikson, people go through a series of crisis resolutions in their development. During childhood (6-12 years) children resolve the crisis of "industry vs. inferiority". That is, children start to discover their areas of competence (or incompetence). For talented young athletes, the athletic arena represents the best and sometimes only forum for gaining these feelings of competence (Heyman, 1987). The more emphasis that is placed on athletic prowess by children and their significant others during development, the more they will come to depend on athletic achievement as a source of self-worth (Heyman, 1987).

During the adolescent stage, the crisis is identity versus role confusion. During this stage, individuals begin defining themselves in consistent and role-related terms; "What are the traits, skills, and behaviours that define me?". This identity foreclosure or adopting a rigid identity provides individuals with a feeling of security and sense of purpose or belonging within their 'place' in the world. For athletes, it is not uncommon for identity to rest strongly and even exclusively on involvement in sport. As long as one's athletic career is going well, anxiety within this identity can be relatively low. However, slumps, poor performances (real or perceived), and injuries can be sources of

considerable anxiety for this individual (Heyman, 1987). A career-ending injury can represent the 'death' of one's identity if it is dependent upon athletic involvement.

Salvador (1984) and Eldridge (1983) both examined the athletic injury within this framework. Salvador identified several factors predicting poor post-injury adjustment (see Table 1). These factors reflect the importance of identity in psychological adjustment to injury. Not surprisingly, those athletes whose significant others are primarily people involved with their sport, whose main or only area of competence is athletics, and who have developed their sense of self through lifelong involvement in sport will be predisposed to difficult psychological adjustment following injury.

Table 1:

Factors Predicting Poor Post-Injury Adjustment in Athletes (adapted from Salvador, 1984)

FACTOR	DESCRIPTION
Lifelong Involvement	Several years, lots of hours/week
One-Dimensionality	Athletes have not defined themselves outside of athletics In order for them to excel in sport, significant others have made allowances for them in other aspects of their lives
Extent of Injury	To what extent does the injury affect mobility, strength, and coordination
Injury History	Long history may affect body image, Few past injuries → don't know how to prepare for them
Professional	Livelihood depends on sport performance
Single	Less support, defined in fewer roles

Lifelong Socialization into Sport	Role that sport has played in forming and maintaining self-concept

This difficulty is compounded dramatically when the injury terminates participation in the sport completely. Athletes are then forced to redefine themselves in new and often unfamiliar terms. This process may be delayed indefinitely if the individuals are unwilling to undergo this identity transition.

Eldridge (1983) emphasized the importance of body image to identity. His findings suggested that sports and movement become associated with autonomy, self-control, and physical mastery. Through them, the child develops feelings of independence and self-worth which are lifelong and serve as a basis for perceptions of control, adequacy, freedom and choice. An injury alters the experience of body and movement on which the athlete has come to depend. This is especially true of the elite or professional athlete whose livelihood is tied to this involvement.

When one understands the role of athletics in the development of identity and self-worth, it becomes clear how an injury can lead to significant psychological distress. But within this framework, what insights can be extracted to help athletes to adjust to their career-ending injuries? First, athletes must develop some flexibility and open-mindedness about their sense of self. If athletes can be convinced that their identities can be dynamic and changeable, they can be empowered to choose what form or direction that their identities will take. In addition, athletes should be encouraged to recognize the enduring aspects of their identities that injury cannot threaten. For example, perseverance and determination are traits that can serve individuals in many fields and endeavors outside of sport. Other areas of competence (academic, artistic, personal) can be further developed and pursued. Certain significant others (not all) will see them with high esteem, independent of their involvement in sport, fostering quality relationships.

Grief Models

The Kubler-Ross stage model (1969) was designed to describe the process of grieving that one experiences after finding out that one is terminally ill. The individual is said to go through five identifiable stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. This model has been adopted by some as an appropriate model for the injured athlete (Astle, 1986; Brewer, 1994; Wolff & Lester, 1989). Astle (1986) suggested that the loss of some aspect of the self would bring about the same set of stages in injured athletes.

The first stage, denial, is a simple defense mechanism in which athletes deny the loss or the problems related to the loss. This is a response to a stimulus or problem that is too overwhelming for individuals to deal with. An injured athlete might deny the seriousness of the injury or attempt to discredit or refute the opinion of the physician.

During the second stage, anger, athletes responds to the self-perceived injustice of the situation and might attempt to blame who they feel is responsible for their injury. This could be an opponent, a coach, a referee, a doctor/therapist or even a divine being. When the anger has no obvious target, its expression could be turned inward or displaced on others (eg./ significant others). An angry wrestler might blame the coach for allowing him to compete against too advanced an opponent.

In the third stage, bargaining, the athlete believes that making an agreement with a powerful person or God can prevent or postpone the loss. (This stage rings true for me as I had a serious football injury and insisted that I could switch from receiver to quarterback in order to prevent similar reinjury when I returned.) An athlete might also commit to a rigorous rehabilitation regimen in hopes that the team medical staff might see great progress and reverse their decision.

The fourth stage, depression, is probably best supported in the literature (Brewer, 1993; Leddy, Lambert, & Ogles, 1994). When the loss is realized, a period of sadness and mourning results. Typically the athlete loses interest in the sport or talking about it. This

depression has been found to include clinical symptoms in many cases (Leddy et. al., 1994), such as social withdrawal, insomnia, lethargy, eating disorders, and even thoughts of suicide.

The final stage is acceptance. It does not imply a happy acceptance of the loss, but rather one that is "practically devoid of emotion" (Astle, 1986, pg. 281). The athlete is able to speak about the loss without emotion and spectate but the thrill and excitement experienced as an active player are gone.

Among the criticisms for using the Kubler-Ross model in this context is its apparent lack of empirical support (Brewer, 1994). Smith, Scott, O'Fallon, and Young (1990) found no discrete stages of emotional responses and found no evidence of denial in any of their participants. Astle (1986) suggested that many people proceed through the stages in different sequences and may fluctuate between stages as they move through the mourning process. This may explain some confusion in identifying discrete sequential stages of the model. However, Chidekel (1991) criticized this use of the model as being superficial with respect to the importance of loss of self. He argued that the loss needs to be viewed within its historical context and advocates a life-historical model for understanding it.

The model may serve as a framework through which injured athletes and their friends and families can understand that their responses are normal and natural. Wolff and Lester (1989) used the Kubler-Ross framework to prepare the counsellor for the stages and to suggest appropriate times to implement certain counselling strategies (such as confrontation and anxiety/depression intervention). For example, there is little that the counsellor can do during the bargaining stage except to listen and observe and be prepared to address the impending depression when it occurs. The usefulness of this model soon after injury (for certain individuals) should be acknowledged. However, the 'acceptance' stage is only the first step of the rest of the individual's life. Acceptance is a necessary condition for the rebuilding process to occur rather than a final 'stage' to be reached.

Affective Cycle of Injury

Heil (1993) described the emotional response to injury as a cycle that consists of three phases, each of which may be revisited several times before the process is complete. The cycle involves movement back and forth *between denial, distress, and determined coping* (Heil, 1993) (see Figure 1). This flexibility distinguishes Heil's model from traditional stage models. Heil (1993) described denial as an important and essential part of the process for some athletes. When athletes have their whole lives invested in sport and participation is essential to identity and self-esteem, it is understandable that termination of their career is more than most athletes could handle. It is therefore important that athletes be able to use this defense mechanism in order to accept their fate at their own pace so as not to be overwhelmed and broken down emotionally.

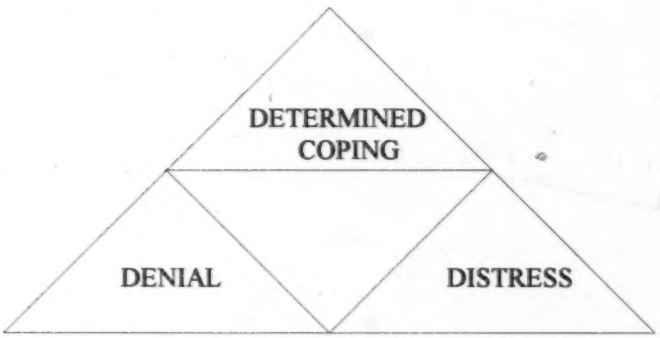

Figure 1. The Affective Cycle of Injury (from Heil, 1993)

It is equally important that individuals experience the process of emotional distress in response to their injury. The emotion of sadness creates a preoccupation with the loss. This allows the individual to contemplate the significance of its consequences and, eventually, to come to terms with it (Botterill, 1995). This low-energy emotion also

allows for an upswing of energy once the loss has been fully grasped so that new directions can be considered and pursued. This is consistent with Baillie's (1992) recommendation that affective expression be emphasized initially, following a career-ending injury.

The third phase of Heil's model, determined coping, involves an adaptive, problem-solving approach to dealing with the injury. For athletes whose careers are terminated, this involves taking active steps to pursue viable outlets for their time, energy, and interests.

Interestingly, Heil's three phases of coping correspond closely to those categories used by Grove, Lavallee, and Gordon (1997) (avoidance-oriented, emotion-focused, and problem-focused) to describe the coping strategies of athletes in transition out of competitive sport. This similarity may lend support to the use of Heil's model in the context of career-ending injury. The findings of Grove et. al. (1997) also reflect the importance of denial and distress in the transition of an athlete with a strong athletic identity.

Information Processing Models

Weiss and Troxell (1986) proposed a four-stage cognitive appraisal model of emotional adjustment to injury (see Figure 2). Empirical validation of this model has been strong (Brewer, 1993, 1994; Brewer, VanRaalte, & Linder, 1993). Following a stressor (in this case an injury), individuals will appraise or assess the situation and their ability to cope with it. This individual interpretation is influenced by both *situational* and *personal* factors. Some situational factors might include social support, time in the season, stage in career, severity and duration of the injury, etc. Personal factors include athletic identity (how strong and/or exclusive), trait anxiety, self-esteem, coping skills, and injury history (Brewer, 1994). The appraisal determines the individual's emotion response which, in turn, determines behavioural response.

Within the context of a career-ending injury, the situational variables of severity and duration could potentially cause the individual to appraise the situation as unmanageable, and result in depressive emotional response and behaviour. Lack of social support (situational) could exacerbate the appraisal. This could be compounded if athletes' identities are one-dimensional (personal) and they have a lot of *unfinished business* in their sport (situational/personal).

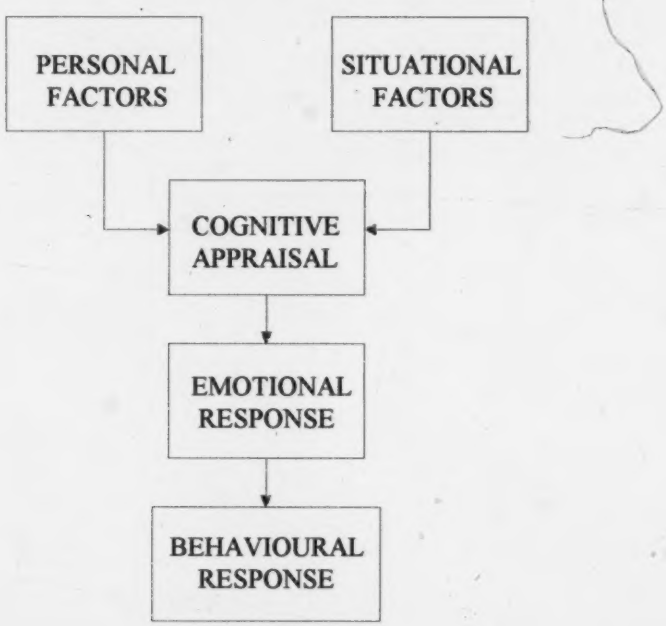

Figure 2. A Cognitive Appraisal Model of Psychological Response to Athletic Injury (From Brewer, 1994)

This model provides a very manageable framework for understanding athletes' response to their injuries. When discussing healthy transition out of sport and into rewarding directions, it may be useful to think of the appraisal as dynamic and on-going. The appraisal of one's injury may vary considerably from day to day depending on numerous factors. For example, if significant others are perceived to withdraw their

support (whether they have or not), self-esteem and confidence to cope may suffer, potentially leading to an emotional breakdown or loss of hope. Conversely, if a prospect for advancement outside of sport (a job opportunity, for example) looks promising, the individual may look positively to the future and see the injury as less devastating. In other words, the process of 'getting over' the injury will likely take some time, and have high and low points as life without sport will invariably be evaluated against life with it.

When assisting athletes in their transitions out of competition, it is possible to identify and evaluate the situational and personal factors which could facilitate or undermine this process. Steps could be taken to address individual variables in order to increase hope and positive directions, while minimizing emotional distress. For example, significant others might be involved in the process so that they can understand and fulfill the support needs of the athlete. Trait anxious athletes might also employ relaxation and positive thinking techniques to enhance their coping with anxiety about their futures outside of sport.

Personal Investment Theory

Another theory which provides a framework for understanding the distress associated with exit from competitive sport is Personal Investment Theory (Duda, Smart, & Tappe, 1989). This theory emphasizes the meaning that one ascribes to his/her participation in an activity. This meaning is determined by a) personal incentives, b) self-beliefs, and c) perceived options. The personal incentives that an athlete can derive from his/her sport include task incentives (task involvement and mastery), social incentives, ego incentives (feelings of power and competitiveness), and extrinsic rewards (scholarships and salaries). Self-beliefs, including identity, competence, self-reliance, and goal directedness, are also provided for the elite performer. And perceived options may be limited by the substantial investment that has been made to athletic excellence. Elite athletes are therefore committed to their sport on multiple levels. Consequently, the loss

of sport represents the loss of multiple incentives and multiple aspects of self, in the face of limited perceived options beyond sport.

Adult Transition Model

Another framework which has not been applied specifically to this context but may be of value in examining it is the adult transition model (see Figure 3) (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Similar to the information processing model, the transition model takes personal and situational factors into account. This model provides a useful guidance tool as it examines the context and impact of the event, then identifies the coping resources of the specific individual: situation (what type of transition), support (social support), self (personality, strengths, and weaknesses), and strategies (coping strategies and approaches). While this model may offer a useful framework for discussion, it offers little specific insight into the nature of loss for the elite athlete.

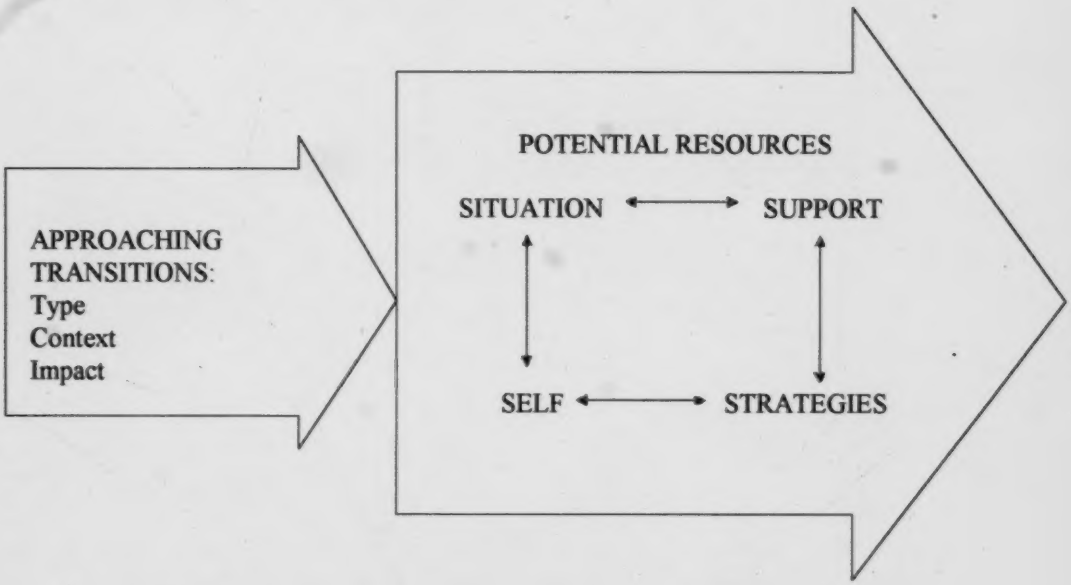

Figure 3: The Adult Transition Model (From Schlossberg et. al., 1995)

While the above models emphasize the cognitive aspects of psychological response to injury, one model draws attention to physiological considerations.

Exercise Dependence Models

Most elite athletes train for several hours a week. Chan and Grossman (1988) found that injured runners experience significantly more depression, anxiety, confusion, and lowered self-esteem than non-injured runners. They point to the role of endorphins in this alteration of mood states. When one exercises, neurotransmitters are released, which create a feeling of euphoria and well-being. Without their extensive training regimen, following injury, athletes may experience certain symptoms in response to this neurochemical deficit, such as loss of energy, irritability, tension, etc. In addition, individuals may become psychologically dependent upon exercise. Fitness and body image may be an important source of self-esteem. If an injury interferes with the maintenance of this level of exercise and fitness, self-esteem may understandably decrease. The above study is limited in its generalizability to top level athletes as its participants were recreational runners. Although it is important not to assume that this is the sole factor contributing to emotional response following injury, it may well be a significant piece of the puzzle.

For the athlete whose career is terminated due to injury, it might be recommended that a certain level of exercise be maintained in order to address this effect. This recommendation may be complicated by the injury if it significantly restricts mobility, especially in the case of spinal cord injuries.

Social Support Systems

Another important consideration for the injured athlete is social support (Ford & Gordon, 1993; Pines & Aronson, 1988). Although there is some debate whether social support acts as a buffer to stressful events (House, 1981) or enhances mental health directly, strengthening coping responses (Hardy, Richman, & Rosenfeld, 1991), it is agreed that adequate support is paramount to the healthy psychological recovery of the injured athlete. Ford and Gordon (1993) outlined eight categories for social support of an injured athlete: listening support, emotional support, emotional challenge, shared reality and experience of injury, treatment appreciation, treatment challenge, personal assistance, and tangible assistance. While many of the categories focus on the actual rehabilitation process, a couple of them offer insights into support for the terminally injured athlete.

Listening and Emotional Support

Throughout the adjustment of injured athletes, they will likely encounter many low points. By simply having someone available to listen, individuals will have an opportunity to verbalize their thoughts and feelings, clarifying in their own minds the significance of the events or loss. Having a friend, family member, coach, or counsellor listen patiently, attentively, and non-judgmentally can facilitate this search for personal significance and self-understanding.

In addition, athletes who have received a great deal of attention from coaches, teammates, fans, and even media, will likely undergo a period of loneliness and isolation which may threaten self-esteem. Having significant others whose support is unchanged by the exit from sport can buffer this experience. If athletes' discovery of their 'true friends' yields a group of people who regard them with high esteem after their sport exit, this support may facilitate recovery of damaged self-esteem and can provide encouragement in new directions and pursuits.

It may be that other individuals who express enthusiasm about the individual's potential in other areas can provide a catalyst to the rebuilding of an athlete's healthy identity. In addition, through the support of significant others, an individual may come to regard caring and personal relationships with greater reverence than the athletic achievement which may have been the primary focus prior to injury.

Emotional Challenge

While Ford and Gordon (1993) emphasized the importance of long and short term goals relevant to physical rehabilitation, this same idea can be applied to terminally injured athletes when addressing their future. Significant others and/or counselors can help individuals to explore other areas of interest and potential while encouraging them to let go of their athletic career and identity. This process can be a difficult one as the period of transition may leave individuals feeling 'identity-less'. Positive regard throughout the process can reduce this anxiety as can the emphasis of attributes and strengths which were unchanged by the injury (such as perseverance, devotion, determination, etc.). Individuals can then have the confidence to move forward and take risks. It should be pointed out that change may be resisted until the injury and its consequences have been at least partially accepted. According to Ford and Gordon, emotional challenge must not precede emotional support because this emotional trauma must be worked through before forward steps can take place.

This chapter highlights several factors and issues which are relevant to athletes with a career ending injury and their subsequent transition out of sport. However, conspicuously absent from the literature is an examination of this process as a whole. Nor has there been a critical look at coping strategies and their effects on adjustment in this context. This study is designed to advance understanding of this phenomenon and provide guidance to those affected by career-ending athletic injury.

Chapter 3:

The Study Design

Some studies have attempted to determine the subsequent well-being of athletes who have suffered a career-ending injury (Kleiber & Brock, 1992). The next step is to determine *how* well-being can be achieved following this experience. A qualitative study was conducted which describes and clarifies *the process* through which some athletes are able to achieve healthy adjustment following their injuries. I would contend that some athletes struggle fruitlessly to 'get over' their exit from sport, never finding new directions that match the rewards and self-esteem that sport provided. Conversely, there are others who are able to rebuild a sense of self in which they take pride. They are able to pursue new goals and explore new avenues of equal or greater fulfillment. By identifying the differences between these two groups, in terms of coping strategies, directions taken, turning points, attitudes, and social support, *a model of healthy adjustment has been created.* This model can be used to guide athletes, who have sustained career-ending injuries, through the experience in a way that might reduce the psychological suffering and provide momentum in new and exciting directions. The model is described in detail in chapter 4.

"What does not kill me, strengthens me." - Friedrich Nietzsche

(pg. 50, Mencken, 1910)

The Design

A qualitative design was selected for this study by virtue of its best fit for examining the phenomenon in question. Three assumptions of qualitative designs illustrate the suitability of this approach (Creswell, 1994).

1.) *Qualitative research is primarily concerned with process.* An attempt to view adjustment as an outcome would neglect its dynamic and ongoing nature. This design allowed an in-depth look at this process.

2.) *Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning - how people make sense of their lives and experiences.* Psychological health and well-being depend largely on one's perception and personal meaning, which was examined in the interviews.

3.) *Qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details.* This study sought to extract a model of healthy adjustment based on the experiences of the participants.

The Role of the Researcher in Qualitative Research

Due to the interpretive nature of the qualitative design, it is necessary to acknowledge the biases, values, and judgment of the researcher. Having experienced a career-ending athletic injury myself, I have a natural interest in the topic and I am now motivated to make the process a less difficult one for others who will go through it in the future. I have my own perceptions of the experience and its significance, which have likely influenced my interpretation. However, I believe that my experiences have enhanced my ability to empathize with the participants and accurately represent their

perceptions. Participants were consulted following the initial analysis in order to ensure that *credibility of analysis* is maximized (i.e./ the interpretation accurately reflects the perceptions of the participants). This step likely reduced the distortion of findings due to researcher biases.

The Participants

Participants for this study were high level athletes who have sustained career-ending injuries. Sufficient time has passed following their injuries so that each *athlete clearly understands* that the injury precludes return to competition. Since I have several contacts in high level athletics, this network was utilized to identify several prospective participants. From this sample, athletes were recruited who represent different durations following injury so that if different stages of adjustment emerged from the data, a richness of description could be documented for apparent stage.

It should be noted that, while the Kubler-Ross stage model has been used to describe the injury experience, it has had only mixed success with athletes and does not describe in great detail the events that characterize each stage (for the injured athlete). Although much of the data is retrospective, this was necessary to explore the process of transition, which covers several years. A longitudinal study of this nature would have exceeded the chronology of a Master's thesis significantly.

Participants in this study represented a high level of competition, as this group tends to have greater psychological investment in sport and, as such, are generally at greater risk for maladjustment (Klieber & Brock, 1992). High level athletics are defined in this study as intercollegiate or national level competition (or higher). The participants in this study included two professional athletes and two varsity athletes (one of whom had been drafted into a professional league).

The participants selected were from two different sports, had their injuries at various stages in their athletic careers, and have gone on in diverse directions, providing very rich

data. All four participants were male. Themes and patterns have been identified which transcend different individuals and their sports. Four participants provided a wealth of data for analysis. All participants were adults, ranging in age from 23 to 35.

'P1' played out his major junior hockey career, then went on to a successful university career. In his final season, he sustained an injury off the ice that shortened his season and precluded high level hockey following university. He has gone on to complete a Masters degree, is involved in minor hockey, and is active in the community in youth outreach programs. Despite some repercussions from his injury, he is still very active and able to do all the things he enjoys.

'P2" played professional football and was arguably entering his prime at the time of injury. Surgery to repair his injury threatened his ability to walk, and at times his life. He is now married with children and is a successful businessman. Unfortunately, he still contends with chronic pain, which restricts his activities at times. However, he maintains his driven disposition. His positive attitude and resilience make him an inspiration to those who know him.

'P3' played professional hockey and sustained his injury well into his professional career. He was married immediately following his injury and is now coaching. He is still very active and is enjoying life after competitive sport (as an athlete). He possesses great interpersonal skills and is well suited to the role of coach. He has no desire to coach in the NHL, since he feels he can make the greatest difference at the level he is coaching now.

'P4' was a highly touted university football player at the time of his injury. After fighting through injury for his final two years and having surgery to alleviate the problem, he chose not to risk reinjury (which would entail serious long-term health problems) and declined a tryout with the team that had selected him early in the college draft. He is now a successful businessman and enjoys a level of fitness close to that of his playing days. He is still driven to provide a positive role model for his community and his culture.

The Data Collection

The means of data collection was be a series of three semi-structured interviews, running approximately 60-90 minutes. In the initial interview, I asked the participants to take me through from pre-injury to present, providing them the freedom to tell their stories. When necessary, probes were used to clarify meanings and interpretations. Subsequent interviews focused on 'filling in the gaps' by addressing the sections outlined below as well as other pertinent themes which emerge through ongoing analysis. In addition, participants were asked to provide feedback on the initial analysis and construction of a model. The items (see Appendix 1) were created based on the models and research to date. This approach allowed detailed, rich, consideration of each participant's experience and perspective. The follow-up interview items were designed to cover the following areas :

The Injury

The participant were asked to recall in some detail the injury itself, paying particular attention to the context in which it occurred (stage in career, age, what their sport-related goals were, how the injury occurred, and the nature of the injury).

The Aftermath

Questions were designed to explore the athletes' experiences following the injury, including affective response, behavioural response, interaction with significant others (including teammates, coaches, parents, friends, counsellors, etc.), and the thoughts that accompanied the experience.

Identity

Athletes were asked questions relating to how they perceived themselves before and after injury, whether the exit from sport led to role and identity confusion, whether their self-worth was affected by the experience, and how central and exclusive sport was to their identity.

Coping Strategies

Participants were asked to describe the different coping strategies that they employed to deal with the trauma of their injury, their emotional response, and the transition out of competitive sport.

Subsequent Directions

Participants described the activities and roles that they have taken on since the injury. Related areas included what subsequent involvement (if any) that they had with their sport, what areas of interest and/or competence they have pursued, how active they are, how fulfilling their new directions are (relative to sport), what relationships influenced their adjustment, and what events served to 'make or break' their adjustment to life without competing in their sport.

Philosophy

Participants were asked to share their ideas and thoughts regarding the meaning that their injury had in their life, how such experiences should be perceived, what can be gained/learned from such an experience, what they learned about

themselves, and what advice they would offer others who have just sustained a career-ending injury.

The interview was reviewed and discussed with one prospective participant (also a graduate student) in order to assess whether the questions would address all of the pertinent issues (this individual was not interviewed). This step was intended to enhance validity and comprehensiveness of the measure. The interview was, at times, expanded to explore any other relevant areas that emerged. This expansion was critical for the identification of factors that characterize healthy or unhealthy adjustment (see analysis).

Analysis

The study was conducted using a **grounded theory** approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As such, analysis was ongoing and responded to **and influenced** data collection. Following transcription, **open coding** was used to identify the relevant concepts of the phenomenon in question. This process involves placing conceptual labels on the events and phenomena (both internal and external) revealed in the data. The concepts were also identified in terms of properties and dimensions. This coding was done line by line on the transcriptions. **Axial coding** was then be employed to draw connections between these concepts. This technique is designed to put the data back together in new ways following open coding based on a coding paradigm including conditions, context, action/interactional strategies, and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). **Selective coding** was used to assemble a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. The central category was identified and a 'story' or descriptive narrative was produced by relating this core category to other categories and testing those relationships against the data. Through this validation, the narrative was 'grounded' in the data. It was this final step which sought to identify the process of a healthy psychological adjustment following

injury. While these stages appear sequential, conceptualization of the process occurred from the start of the first interview and was modified throughout the research process.

The analysis was conducted through the data collection and shaped the direction of the interviews. Following the first interviews, a tentative model was created. The second interviews were designed to cover the material not covered through the open format of the first interviews. In addition, the themes and tentative model extracted from the first interviews were further examined through the second interviews. Finally, a third interview allowed the participants to provide feedback on a more refined model, developed from both first and second interviews.

The results will address whether healthy or unhealthy adjustment to injury follows identifiable stages and whether specific thoughts, emotions, behaviours, or events characterize each stage. A model was created that illustrates the process by which an athlete can emerge from this experience healthy, successful and fulfilled. This model may provide crucial guidance for the athlete whose career has been terminated by injury. In addition, the experiences and factors that are detrimental to healthy adjustment are identified and discussed. Special attention was given to the behaviours, attitudes, and philosophies that were most conducive to positive experiences following injury.

Healthy adjustment is based on a subjective assessment of satisfaction, enthusiasm, and hope that various factors and processes precede or accompany. For example, if talking out feelings with a close friend was found to create feelings of positive affiliation, and reduce feelings of hopelessness and isolation, this factor would then be said to contribute to healthy adjustment.

The next chapter outlines the model designed to describe the process of healthy adjustment to a career-ending injury and presents the data within its framework.

Chapter 4:

Results of the Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the interviews. This data are organized according to the model that was developed during data collection and analysis. A general outline of this model is described below.

Consistent with Coakley's (1983) findings, much of what determines healthy adjustment does appear to lie in social factors such as development of other skills and strengths, relationships outside of sport, and support from family and friends. The results of this study indicate that attention to these issues can improve the prognosis of life satisfaction. The findings also provide a broad ray of hope following the findings of Kleiber, Greendorfer, Blinde, and Samdahl (1987) which indicated that the experience of a career-ending injury may predispose an athlete to lower life satisfaction. The model presented here brings to life the main themes that, if addressed can enhance adjustment following such an experience.

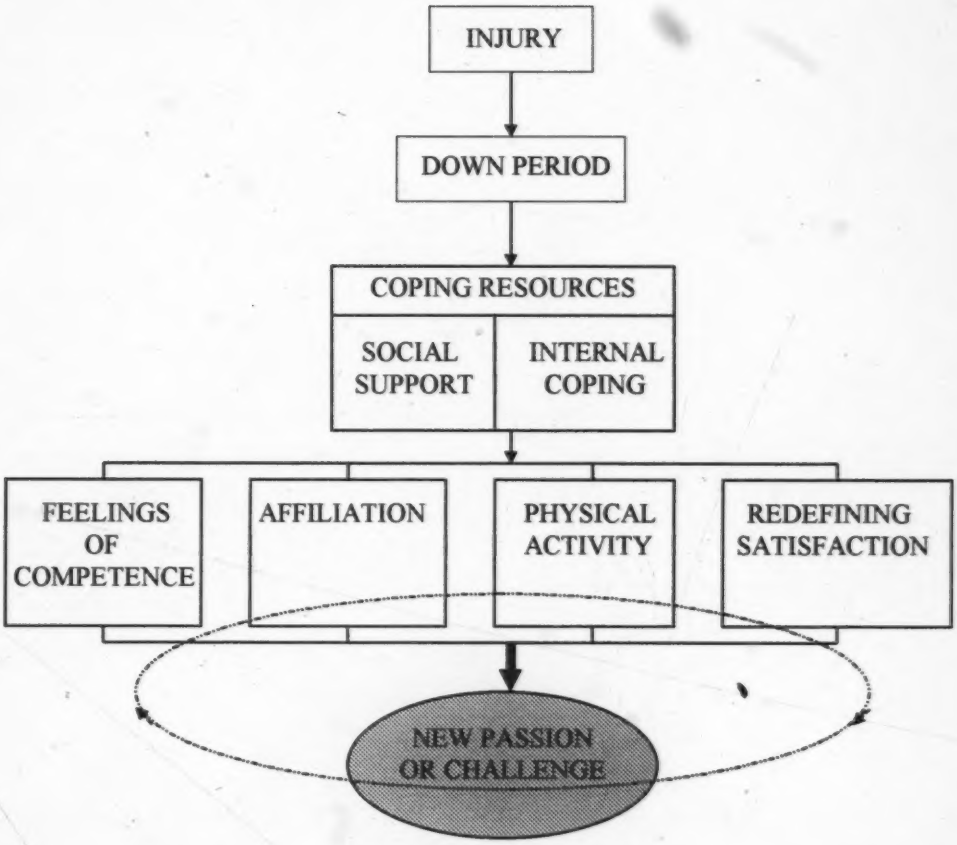

Figure 4: A Model of Healthy Adjustment Following a Career-ending Athletic Injury.

The 'Down' Period

Following their injuries, participants all went through a period of sadness, characterized by low energy, lack of motivation, inactivity, and withdrawal. It is contended that this is a natural and necessary phase of adjustment in which individuals come to terms with the significance of their loss.

Individuals may also go through a period of denial. This denial may well be a mechanism by which the implications of the injury can be *slowly* accepted, preventing the individual from being overwhelmed.

The down period seems to involve 'taking stock' of one's life and all its components. As such, it may be crucial to an athlete gaining 'perspective' (seeing the loss within a larger context), prior to the consideration of new pursuits and activities.

Social Support

Throughout the process of adjustment, the presence and support of friends and relatives, *whose positive regard for the individual is unchanged by the injury*, can preserve a sense of belonging while reinforcing feelings of self-worth, *independent of involvement in sport*. Respect for the pace at which an individual chooses to move through his adjustment appears to be crucial for the effectiveness of an individual's support base. The support of a counsellor or sport psychologist (previous coach) may also facilitate healthy expression and direction following injury.

Internal Coping

Common to all of the participants was some philosophy or mental strategy for coping with the loss. Approaches included religious beliefs, gaining perspective, focusing on the present, focusing on the positive, and a refusal to focus on the past and the 'what if's. The effectiveness of these strategies appears to lie, not in the approach taken, but in the vigilance with which it is practiced.

Feelings of Competence

For many athletes, the primary source of feelings of competence is sport. With the loss of sport, it is important that individuals develop or acquire other aspects of personal aptitude. This may involve other roles within sport (coaching, administration) or may be

outside of sport altogether. Of primary importance is developing a sense of worth that is not contingent upon performance in sport.

Many of the qualities necessary for excellence in sport can be recruited in this process, including leadership, perseverance, discipline, communication, etc.

Affiliation

Much of an athlete's sense of belonging comes from the relationships with teammates, coaches, and support staff. Common goals, values, and experiences, as well as frequent and consistent interaction lead to close ties which can be threatened at the time of exit from sport. As an athlete begins exploring new roles and activities, new relationships, based on new 'common ground', can cultivate a renewed sense of belonging. Old relationships can be positively maintained if they are not contingent upon or solely focused on athletic involvement.

Physical Activity

The fitness and high level of activity maintained by an elite athlete become a major component of self-image. Some of the participants expressed frustration with the loss of these high levels. While logistics may preclude the same *volume* of participation, devoting some time and energy to the physical self may be a crucial component in the preservation of mental and emotional well-being. Athletes whose injuries preclude the same types of activities may require introduction to new activities that challenge and fulfill them despite physical restrictions. To the extent that an individual can retain some manifestation of this physicality, this aspect of the self can be maintained.

Redefining Satisfaction

Common to all of the participants is a feeling that few of their new activities can match the *intensity* of their experiences as athletes. This discrepancy can be less problematic to those who recognize that, while lacking the same intensity of sport, other

pursuits can provide a sense of satisfaction that is more enduring. This shift may be best described as periods of contentment vs. moments of elation.

Other forms of fulfillment may come as a result of non-competitive activities. This broadening of the concept of 'what enhances our experience' can be a key contributor to subsequent life satisfaction.

Some of the participants have also enjoyed a shift from the individual fulfillment of athletic achievement to a more altruistic experience by which their activities enhance the experience of others. Examples include coaching, teaching, counselling, parenthood, etc.

New Passion or Challenge

It should be recognized that participants of elite sport are driven towards high standards of achievement and personal excellence. Years of dedication make this a primary component in the psyche of such individuals. As such, preservation of positive self-image may depend on an individual's ability to pursue with passion some personal vision or challenge, *even if not an athletic one*. Lack of such direction can potentially result in stagnation and preoccupation with the sport career which has been terminated.

The Structure of the Model

One of the objectives of the study was to determine whether the adjustments of the participants followed an identifiable set of stages. However, the only identifiable sequence involved a necessary down period prior to movement in a positive direction. While the duration of this period varied, it was present and occurred first for all of the participants.

Internal coping represents the manner in which ongoing perception of the loss (sport) can best be managed. The presence of *social support* appears to have been a catalyst for positive action of the participants. However, the extent to which they were willing to be 'helped' varied. The predominant coping style involved internalizing and avoiding open expression of loss and grief. Possible reasons for this approach will be addressed later.

The four areas requiring attention in the adjustment process include *feelings of competence, affiliation, physical activity, and satisfaction*. These areas represent the thematic areas of most significance in the transition. They represent elements which sport provided for the athlete's identity and quality of experience. As such, identifying ways in which these voids can be filled seems to offer the greatest potential for healthy transition.

I do not mean to imply that all of these areas *must* be addressed for each athlete to adjust to life without elite sport. However, the more grounds on which the individual can rebuild life after sport, the greater potential for fulfillment of the whole person. The sequence in which one rebuilds these elements did not appear to be significant. They are ongoing and dynamic, and do not lend themselves to an 'end point'.

Pursuing a *passion or challenge* was central for the adjustment of all of the participants. Although it appears last in the model, this direction serves as a primary motivator for the individual and can be a factor from the 'down period' on. While this direction may provide a vehicle by which the other elements can be established, its strength and momentum can be fueled by the development of those other elements, thus implying a circular nature of this relationship.

Put very simply, adjustment seems to depend on four factors: 1) the significance of the loss for each element, 2) the strength of coping with that loss (coping resources include internal coping and social support), 3) the extent to which each element can be filled after sport, and 4) the presence of some direction into which the individual can pour his energy.

The remainder of this chapter provides elaboration of the four factors above. First, the process of coming to terms with the significance of the loss is examined. Interview data are used to illustrate the characteristics and function of this stage.

1.) The Significance of the Loss

The 'Down Period'

Common to all of the participants was a period in which their emotions were depressed, they lacked motivation, were inactive, isolated themselves, and attempted to come to terms with what they had lost. While our initial response might be to try to alleviate the suffering of people experiencing loss, upon closer inspection, this period of sadness appears to be functional. In short, the individual needs to hurt for a while.

After a life that is devoted primarily to sport, a career-ending injury represents not only a significant loss in itself, but it also creates a state of uncertainty about the future:

> P1: So It was pretty disappointing. I guess I kind of felt deflated and said, well what am I going to do now? It was something I'd done for so long, I enjoyed doing it.
> ... I guess initially I kind of felt like "what now?" "What am I going to do now?" I'm in a cast and who knows if I'll ever do things with my hand again?
> ... And then afterwards, when I got the news that it was as serious as it was, then that was the time when that thread of hope was gone. I kind of ... felt so deflated, I didn't know where to go or how it was going to affect me throughout the rest of my life. It was a total time of uncertainty or unknown.

> P4: It was tough. It made me somewhat agitated, upset. It was tough.
> ... Like, I had a fear feeling and I was scared, but I didn't really show it, of course. But I was s---in' my pants, and I was sad, I mean, I was sad, buddy, I was sad. I never felt suicidal but I was sad to the point where it was tough. I cried a lot about it and it was very difficult times for me.

In order to process the loss and the implications for the future, participants seemed to need time to themselves. Until they had sufficiently processed the event, interactions with others was kept to a minimum:

> P1: For the first two week period it was like... yeah, life really was kind of over in a sense and I tried to make myself seen but avoid conversations about my accident. ... After the operation, I didn't call anybody or tell anybody about it. A couple of times my friends would call when I wasn't home and I didn't return their calls. I hadn't dealt with it myself yet to be able to talk to other people. It took maybe a couple of weeks before I would even talk about it with my roommates. Like I'd be at the house but I'd just kind of just stay quiet and watch T.V. with them but avoid any conversation about what had happened or what was going to happen from here on in.
>
> ... I didn't really want to see anybody outside of talking with my parents or seeing my girlfriend, or whatever, a couple of my close friends...
>
> ... I don't know if I didn't want to deal with anybody's questions, it was more of me kind of, I don't know, just trying to digest what had just happened and realize the extent of what the injury was.
>
> ... I remember, I don't know, I just didn't want to talk about it. I had to deal with it myself before I could talk to other people about it.

> P4: I withdrew for a while for sure. No question, I definitely withdrew for a while.

In order to focus on the loss, participants also lacked motivation for other activities. The resultant inactivity created conditions for reflection on the loss:

> P1: And I think that (news from the doctor) kinda, ... I think that might have been the factor that put me in that kinda week or two week ... trance, I guess, if you

want to put it that way. I don't know, really distraught, kind of, I don't know, felt not useless, I mean, I still had function but I felt, I don't know ... I didn't want to do anything for two weeks.

... For the first month or so, I didn't really go out at all, I didn't move from the house a whole lot. I watched movies, I went to school, but I didn't go out at night with all my buddies or things like that. I just kinda, I wasn't interested at the time.

P3: September of '95 was the toughest month that I've ever gone through. It was just, you know, I didn't go to the rink. It was just tough every day to motivate myself to do something because of the fact that I wasn't going to the rink. But we got through that month of September and October and it just got better and better. And I started doing things, you know, like ... it didn't matter what, just anything, and I got through it.

The function of this period is essentially to come to terms with what has happened, having time to ascribe meaning to the event:

P3: I guess the biggest thing was when I got hurt, from the time I got hurt to the time I announced my retirement, I had some time to think about it. It wasn't like it was 'bang, bang' and you said that's it, you're done. You know, I had some time to think about it, and I think maybe that helped as well...

P1: Like I said, I had that period when I sort of went into seclusion and didn't really talk to anybody or listen to anyone or take phone calls. You just kind of wanted to just sit in a room by yourself and kind of sulk for a while and then come to terms with it.

... Just digest as much as you feel you can consume at a time. You just take a little bite of it and say "enough of that", go back later. (laughs)

The unanimous experience of this down period also implies some function thereof. Botterill (1995) described sadness as a period in which all of the resources are focused on drawing significance of some event or loss in one's life. A drop in energy levels facilitates the preoccupation with that thought process. The result is an upswing in energy and renewed feelings of hope and interest in the future. Put very simply by one of the participants:

P1: You almost have to bottom out before it's time to climb out of the hole.

The Role of Identity

Part of one's perception of the significance of the loss is related to the role that sport played in that individual's identity. Brewer (1993) determined that the stronger and more exclusive the identification with the athletic role, the more difficult that coping with injury would be. Such implications were evident in this study. Participants indicated that a significant portion of their identity had been lost in transition:

P1: I kind of felt that people didn't associate me the same way, like my status had changed, it was a level of status that I had felt that I had lost. I had a status that I was not only an athlete but a student as well, whereas now I just felt that I was a student only, and that was kind of a weird transition.

... But it was like sport almost gave me an identity, within the university environment, or within the community I played junior in. It was kind of, I don't know, you had that cloak that you were an athlete, an elite athlete that played hockey, and that didn't necessarily give you privileges, but it drew attention to you, even though you didn't ask for it, just because you were this person, you drew attention to yourself.

P2: We were always taken care of. So when that end comes, it's a bit of an adjustment for a lot of guys. Some guys really struggle with it. It's really hard for them. They'd looked at their own 'what defines them' and ... they were football. They were bigger, badder, nastier, faster, and tougher than anyone else. It's all part of the persona. You were a football player.

Not surprisingly, the strength of the identification with that role can be enduring, long after the athlete's career has been ended. Eight years following one individual's injury, athletic identity was still evident:

P2: When you said an athlete or former athlete ... I still consider myself an athlete. I thought "wait a minute" (laughs) "Well he's right." (laughs) No you're right, but it just twigged for me. That old foundation is always gonna be there for me, I guess.

Years after injury, an identity that was once clear and well-defined can become ambiguous, and the search for self-definition can remain unsolved. When asked what defines him, one participant responded in this way:

P2: That I don't know. I really don't know. And that's a sincere answer. And it's something that I'm currently working through, with help, to find that answer. I'm really curious as to what it is because sometimes I work like a maniac around here and people look at me like "why do you work like that?" My wife asks me. My kids ask me. I remember once, I came home and my wife was all upset and one of my kids asked her if I still lived there, because I hadn't seen them for a week and a half or something. And I'd just been working.

However, if the primary mode by which one defines oneself is through enduring personality characteristics, the loss of elite sport need not represent a significant loss of identity loss:

> P2: I do believe in hard work and all that stuff. If I had to come up with a word, I would say 'survivor'. So I was always trying to look out for tomorrow. I've always been aware of that, that you better watch out for yourself .... survival.

> P3: I'm easygoing, laid back, but that's sort of the weird thing about me is I am easygoing, I love to have fun, but when it's time to work, I'm very intense, very businesslike. But if I was out on the street and someone just met me, I would think that someone who just met me would think that I was an easygoing guy, a nice guy, that would give anybody the time of day, or just whatever, you know. I'd help anybody out.
> ... You know, whatever direction the wind's blowing, I might be blowing that way.
> ... I don't know if I see myself any differently than what I was. There's one thing I learned growing up is you never forget where you came from. So I don't think I've changed too much from when I was a player or before I was a player, to when I was a player to now. I've tried to keep it on an even keel. And sure there's a lot of prestige of being an NHL hockey player, but as long as you can be very humble and very together and very respectful of everybody else, you shouldn't have to change a lot, and I don't think I have changed a lot. I think I'm still the same guy.

Similarly, if one defines oneself by a cumulation of experiences from which one can always draw, then transition can represent less of an identity loss and more of a gain:

> P1: Well, I know the progression of hockey all the way through is always gonna be a part of who I am, and I always look back to those experiences, you know, to

look back and reflect on them to make future decisions. So I think it's always gonna be part of my character, but I think also, the strength that I've gained in leaving that group and being more of an individual is something that I'll reflect on and gain more self-confidence from.

... Now, through my school, I get my identity, or through my friends I get my identity. I don't rely on my association to a group for an identity, so I guess it's changed that way.

I feel it is important to point out that although the elements of competence, affiliation, physicality, and fulfillment are in their own sections, separate from this one, these elements represent key components of one's identity and should not be seen as separate from it. The reader is therefore encouraged to view each of those elements in that light.

Coping Tendencies Prior to Injury

In order to fully understand the coping responses of each athlete to injury, it is necessary to consider how the individual coped with adversity in the past and to what extent he/she had dealt with adversity and personal loss. Certain similarities in coping tendencies were evident, although history of coping with loss varied. For example, there seemed to be a tendency towards coping internally by the participants:

P1: I guess basically I don't look for support outside myself. I kind of like taking it on myself to do it. I mean, it's good to have people to talk to sometimes but I don't go to a person and say, "listen, I don't know how to handle this".

... I try not to go into what you'd consider self-destruct mode or self-harm mode where I'd turn to, I don't know, violence or more of an exterior emotion, lash out or anything like that. I'm not that type of person. I'm more internal.

P2: I guess I'm not a ... you might be surprised but I was sort of banking on the fact of this not being shared with my name attached to it, but I'm not a good person for sharing a lot of things. Like, feelings and emotions and that sort of stuff. Like, I have maybe three people in my life, and my wife is only starting to be one of them now. I've been married for ten years. It's very difficult for me to share info. And even with some of my friends, I tend to go in a hole or really withdraw. Just from my background, you know, stuff with my dad and all that stuff, living, and I was on my own at 16, you just learn by yourself that "you'd better figure it out here, kid, you're on your own. There's no one else you can rely on." So, I tend to pull back and do that, internalize it and figure out how I'm gonna cope with it. So whether I withdrew even more is quite possible. But, again, for me to recognize it is difficult because it's always been a response for me. It's a very natural response. It's not a new thing that I did, where all of a sudden my behaviour was quite different. It's just a natural response for me as a person. Right or wrong. Probably wrong. But whatever, we all have our own ways about us. That's my way.

P4: I mean, I don't like to be too emotional. And, you know, that's just how I deal with things. Whether it's right or wrong, I don't know, but ... yeah, I just put up the mask.

... But as you know, as I described to you, I'm a pretty private person. I kind of kept it all in. I just kind of got into work and kind of let it go. But it was sad, but I was quiet and people knew the quiet meant something. I'm the kind of person who's quite emotional and quite talkative, but when I'm being quiet, there's something wrong. I kept it low, I kept it quiet. And deep down, my family and close friends probably knew what was going on. But ultimately, I'm a big boy and I just have to take it, you know.

One participant even acknowledged the isolating and potentially maladaptive nature of this coping style:

> P2: You don't want to be a downer. Whatever reason, it's just something I had learned to do. And again, right or wrong, I don't think it's right. If I looked at someone else's situation when they went through it, and they told me these responses, I'd say "yeah, well you f---ed up, you idiot. You should have shared it, got some counselling or whatever, talked to people. But for me, it's the way I deal with things.

One participant, who had to deal with significant losses prior to his injury, described the benefits of these experiences:

> P2: Well, I've also gone through some personal issues that may have helped me deal with that particular issue, with that level of sense of loss. My folks had split up when I was 16 or something like that. I had to learn to believe in myself pretty young. And then my dad moved out. So I was living alone at sixteen, in a house. So I had to take care of myself from that age. I had to become self-reliant pretty quick. I had to figure out how to overcome loneliness and a bit of despair when you're by yourself. And then I moved out here with my dad and at age 20, ... he died on me. So again I was all alone. He was the only guy that I connected with. He was my life in that sense. ... I'm not suggesting that I'm necessarily great or better at it but I'm more grounded. I've just been forced to deal with a lot of issues that fortunately most of us don't have to deal with, most of us in society. Because it really sucks to have to go through all that s---. ... And I think it helped with the career-ending injury. It's another loss.

> ... My dad dying was a colossal event in my life. Because that's when I really became the survivor. I had to, right? So I've been able to learn a whole lot since then. I don't know, I learned a lot about myself and just how to become a survivor, very self-reliant at that point. It did a lot of good for me. I mean, it still sucked. If he was still here, we could share a lot of things and all that kind of stuff, of course, but ... it just made me grow up right then, you know.

Another participant had similar feelings:

> P3: And that's probably why I'm strong now, I've had to cope with a death in the family. My brother. Yeah, so maybe that helps me too.

One participant's comments on the lack of loss and hardship reflected a naivity prior to his injury:

> P4: And it was tough because the people who said to me "what happens if you get injured?" I said "don't worry about it". I remember they used to say to me, my relatives who care about me said "what happens if you get injured?" And you always think, yeah, I'll recover, but you never realize we're not supermen. And I wasn't Superman.

Later in the results, effective internal coping with these injuries will be considered. But the use of such coping is reflected in this participant's comments regarding his habitual internal style well prior to injury:

> P1: I guess I just kind of put it in the back of my mind. I won't necessarily stress every minute of my day to be dealing with it. I'll kind of be concerned about it but I'll just try to go on with other things and not think about it for a while and then it

> usually comes to the point where it appears not as bad as what you initially thought it was. And you just start realizing that other people have gone through it and have succeeded or they've been able to get by it.
>
> ....Yeah, kind of, I just run it over in my head, this scenario or that scenario and kind of relate it to other things in my life, look to other things in my life that are still together or still positive, things I take pride in and focus my efforts there.

These types of thoughts which facilitate perspective and focusing on the positives and the future are illustrated in greater detail when coping strategies in response to injury are considered. However, the coping tendencies prior to injury provide a useful context in explaining the significance that an athlete ascribes to his injury.

Feelings of Competence Derived From Sport

The extent to which an athlete derives his feelings of competence from sport provides further explanation for the significance drawn from the loss of sport. All of the participants, coming from an elite sport background, were able to experience positive affective and confidence in their lives as a result of their sporting exploits. The feelings associated with 'being good at something' represented a vital component of their identities. Negative affective in response to exit from sport makes more sense within this context.

Participants experienced distress when their primary or sole feelings of competence or personal aptitude came from sport:

> P2: I mean you and I can take anybody else out there in that office of seventy plus people and pick a sport that perhaps we haven't even played before, we would be better than the average guy. I'll put any amount of money on it. Just because we were born athletes. So you grew up with that. That's just what you do. We play.

... I remember lying in that bed thinking "I'm never gonna use this leg again." Now, for an athlete who grew up with a lot of my self-esteem, and something you could always count on is going out there and picking any sport and I could be better than the average guy and feel good about it, was gone. That hurt. That one was tough. That was pretty tough. It wasn't just being out of football, it was being out of everything.

... God said to make the boy an athlete and, f---, there I was. ... That's just how we were born right? You just use your cards. Use your talents. But now, it's gone. That's the thing I could always count on. I could always count on being a little better. Now I couldn't even count on that. I've never considered myself a Rhodes scholar candidate. I don't think I'm stupid but ... that was just my fallback, being an athlete. Now I didn't have that to fall back on. Yeah it sucks. That really sucked.

P4: You see, a lot of my strength and confidence came from sports and that was tough. When you don't have that, where do you find that strength to be who you are? That was tough. That was tough.

... So I wasn't the most intelligent guy, and academically, I said school was not important to me. So I didn't have confidence as an academic. I didn't have confidence as a scholar. I didn't have confidence to read and become intelligent and be successful in that. I didn't have that confidence. You know, when it came to sports, I was always confident about being someone. In real life and business, I love business, but I wasn't really confident about that because I didn't have strength.

The acquisition of this competence also required significant commitment of time and energy, making it a greater loss:

P2: With any sport, it takes a little while to sort of figure it out, then all of a sudden you get it figured out and then you excel at it, right. And I'd just hit the excel period.

P3: I think ever since I was five years old, you know, Mom & Dad always stressed school and everything but hockey was number two no matter what. I spent a lot of time, you know, after school until nine at night or Saturdays from eight in the morning until six or seven at night, I spent, in the winter time, on the outdoor ice. I think that was a big part of making my career the way it was. I had the skills to do it because I'd worked on them every single day.

In addition, leaving this field of high achievement includes leaving the accolades that accompany it:

P4: And I was, you know, leading the country, leading the nation, getting all the press, and life was feeling really good and people were talking about All-Canadian, and records...

With the loss of sport, a necessary shift in this source of self-esteem that emerges:

P2: As a kid, my whole self-esteem was built on my ability to be physically better than the average guy. So that's kind of what I was always able to hang my hat on. I was always better than the average guy. When I talked about foundations, my foundation was always the sports end of things, again my ability to be a little better than everybody ... what separates me and what's okay about me, it still is. I'm still building that foundation.

Strength of Affiliations Within Sport

Another important factor influencing the perceived significance of the loss is the strength of the relationships and feelings of affiliation within sport. Participants expressed feelings of belonging and tight bonds with teammates and the collective 'team':

> P1: I guess what I missed most was being part of the social unit of a hockey team and having your buddies and your trips and your team functions and things like that.
>
> ... I don't know if you'd call it a family, but a larger group, a larger social unit that you do things with and go here with. I miss that. That's probably the biggest thing I miss. And I guess that's part of your identity, being identified as being part of a group. So that's changed, you're more of an individual now than a part of a group.
>
> ... But in regards to just kind of a social satisfaction, I think I really miss it a lot. I don't know if I miss the game as much, playing the actual game, but I know I really miss being a part of the team and traveling as a group on the bus trips and the hotels, and having that common bond with a group of thirty or thirty-five people, including the coaching staff, like, I don't have that now. Almost like you lose that network, that family, which I think is the biggest thing that I miss right now.
>
> ... So basically, you miss that, being a part of that big social group, those times that, you know, you travel together, you practice together, you hang out at school together, when there's a party, you go there together, if you go to a nightclub, you go there together, if there's some kind of team function, you were just always with those people, over and over again. It was just like, you know, a family, you could count on them for whatever you needed or vice versa, they'd approach you, you

don't have that same number of close friends as you did, with the same kind of bond and the common interests.

For one participant, a clear contrast can be seen when post-athletic relationships are considered:

> P1: Now that I'm not playing a team sport, that network is not there and you don't, your relationships are limited now, you have like four or five or six people that you consider close, that you communicate with or hang out with on a regular basis, whereas before you had thirty guys that you saw every day in practice, were in the same dressing room, weekends you stayed in the same hotel, you know, two or three guys in a hotel room. That social aspect is really different.
> ... You don't have that sense of affiliation with a group of people or with a team or with an institution. You're not part of that social relationship, social unit basically.

Ties are strengthened by a commonality of experience. Teammates have common values goals and objectives:

> P1: You're all there for the same purpose. Everyone's there with the serious intent that we want to win. Someone was always sticking up for you, you were always sticking up for somebody else, if a fight broke out or ... you were more of a team because you experienced more together and you went through more things. I know the friends that I had in junior I'll be friends with for the rest of my life. I may not see them for five years but I know that the moment I see them, we won't greet each other with a handshake, it'll be a hug. Some of us are that close.

Unfortunately, career-ending injury may provide an awkwardness between the injured athlete and his former teammates. Few players like to think about their own exits from sport, and an injured player may represent a reminder of its inevitability:

> P2: Um, it's funny with teammates, they're scared that it could happen to them. They really are. A lot of guys came to the hospital when I was in there. Some of them, I truly don't remember, because I was so dopey. But no one would come over to the house, a couple phone calls maybe. A couple of guys. Everybody's afraid it could happen to them, like you've got a disease. You know, it's kind of funny.

The Physicality of the Elite Athlete

For elite athletes, much of who they are revolves around their physical experience and high levels of physical activity. Threats to this physicality can add to the sense of loss associated with career-ending injury. Much frustration can come as a result of perceived sudden loss of physical ability:

> P1: Well, yeah, it's always on my mind that it's not as good as it was or I'm not as able to do things that I did before at a particular level, at a high level, it's still annoying.
>
> ... Then there are times that, if I don't make the play, like in hockey, I'll automatically attribute it to my hand. Like, it wasn't because I made a mistake or it wasn't because I got pulled off the puck or I just basically fanned on it and didn't make the play, I always go "well, it's because of my hand" You always revert it back to your hand, most of the time because it kind of keeps rolling over your head that you've lost the ability to perform the skill at the level that you could at one time previous to the injury.

P2: If that (use of leg) never came back, I might not be sitting here. You might be looking at a different person. But it wouldn't be because of football, it would be more just using my body. I still feel that I can use my body. I get frustrated because I'll never be able to use it as I did.

An athlete who is used to enormous levels of physical output can be stifled by a sudden decrease:

P1: I did nothing physical for about six months, which was kind of annoying for me, kind of hard to handle because I was an active person that plays a lot of sports.

P4: Whether it's hitting someone or yelling and screaming on the field, or just going for an awesome workout or running a bunch of 150's or 30 yd sprints. It's just that power, that exhilaration. You can't really do that when you go to the office every day. You can't do that. And a lot of people can't do that in their lives.

For one participant, sport represented a 'release' for aggression. He found the loss of this release difficult:

P4: And my problem was, when I didn't have sports, I didn't know where to take that aggression. I didn't know where I could let it out. And it was very frustrating because sometimes I was emotional. And nobody really knew what was wrong or why I was upset. But really, in sports, I was able to get rid of that aggression, on a weekly basis or a daily basis, at times.

Another participant found the sensation of complete exhaustion rewarding and felt this feeling could never be duplicated outside of sport:

> P2: It's a peculiar thing to say, I guess, but that complete exhaustion, I think, is an awesome feeling. And it only happened a couple times where I felt that way. And one of the games, I was playing with the (jr. team). We lost. I got the s--- kicked out of me. I was a runningback and there was just nothing left of me at the end of the day. I was just completely spent. But it was a great feeling as I look back and I'll never be able to have that again. And that's a happiness that you can spend yourself that thoroughly. You're completely spent. And not just a tired shuffling walk, but this ... it's all out there. And I'll never have that again. I'll never have that thrill again, that bit of happiness, where I really did get a lot out of that. It's such a great feeling. A bit of euphoria I guess. And now you try to get it other ways but, again, this big (makes 'small' gesture) what am I? I'm an athlete.

Feelings of Fulfillment Associated With Sport

For one participant in particular, it seems that sport provided a set of sensations and a fulfillment of dreams which he saw as a pinnacle of his experience. Both his experiences and the anticipation of even greater ones were seen to be lost:

> P4: I've often described that being able to play sports and being able to be strong would never compare to any success I've had in business or any money. I mean, I couldn't put a price tag on the days of running or the days of getting ready for a pro camp. I mean, I would have given up $100 000 to play one year in the CFL, making 26 grand a year. Just to have played that one year and enjoy that goal that was kind of a lifelong dream.

> ... And working out and sweating is okay, but it's not the same as being on the field, in the fresh air, in the cold weather or a nice hot day and getting some sun, feeling the energy, and the leaves, I mean, those were great, it was a great environment, you know.

It may be that future experiences will always be perceived as less favourable when compared to these 'good old days':

> P4: I'm happy, but not that happy. Like, I'm happy, I'm healthy, I'm training, I'm working out, having fun, but I'm not feeling totally fulfilled, in terms of how I was when I was a football player. I mean, those were good times at Uof(X). You know? I remember one game, the game was on TSN. And I remember coming back and actually thinking "wow", it was at (name of home stadium), tons of fans and just going "what a day, this is what it's all about". It was a hot day, sweating, (XXX) Bowl. What more do you want?

Losing the Challenge of Sport

A common characteristic of all the participants was a need to strive for excellence in sport. The unanticipated exit from sport closed the door on the fulfillment of this need and seemed to prevent any satisfactory closure for this lifelong pursuit:

> P4: I knew that I wanted to achieve that same success in my life, but I knew that I couldn't do it in sports anymore. And that was very difficult because I really loved sports. I loved being committed to that. I never loved being committed to academics.
>
> ... Like I was confident to the point where, I was in high school, I was talking about being a professional athlete, because I just knew what kind of an athlete I

was, and my own confidence. Of course, no one else would say you can or can't, but it was my own inner strength, because I knew I could run. I knew I had strength. And when I went to Uof (X) and I started accomplishing certain things in my career, things were sort of happening in that direction, you know. I got drafted and I was injured. I almost went through the whole phase, except I missed the last phase.

P2: Um, I guess I just hadn't quite reached what I thought was the best of my potential. I thought it was coming along pretty well in my last season, and I sort of had the game figured out. But now, there's such a learning curve when you jump to pro, in how must faster and how much more complex the game is, that you're really behind. Then all of a sudden, you get it figured out, you're like "yeah, all right, now I know how this works"

Interviewer: Now let's play.

Yeah, exactly. And that's when the rug sort of got pulled. I was fortunate to get one year where I was sort of operating under the 'I've got it figured out' regime. But I just wanted to see if I could take that level again a little higher and the opportunity wasn't there.

2.) Strength of Coping Resources

The coping resources of the participants were put into two categories: social support and internal coping. *Social support* refers to those individuals whose presence and behaviours allowed the individual to progress through the transition process in a healthy and positive way. *Internal coping* refers to those thoughts and behaviours that the participants used in order to deal with their injuries. This category also embodies personal philosophy, beliefs, values, and religion where applicable.

Social Support

The support of certain key individuals who were close to the athletes seems to have provided effective guidance and encouragement that facilitated coping with the exit from sport. Although one might intuitively search for the right words and actions to make the individual feel better, it appears that one of the key behaviours that can be of most help does not involve this search at all. Participants expressed relief when there friends and family treated them the same as they had prior to the injury. It may be that in this time of transition and identity confusion, consistency can be very good medicine:

> P1: (Of one helpful person) He was different in that, despite the injury, he kind of treated me the same way as he did before, whereas most of my other people kind of, were sympathetic, and you know "How's it goin'?" The questions were all focused around my injury. With him, he just, you know, he was aware of it but he just kinda didn't really talk about it that much, like he'd mention it here and there but he was more concerned about, you know, just me as the way I was before, the same type of person, you know the same jokes, he'd make jokes at me, I'd make jokes at him. He kind of talked to me on the same basis as if the injury hadn't happened.
>
> ... And then, at the time, my girlfriend, she didn't harp on the fact that it had happened. She just still asked me "let's go to the show" like she would any other night, or "let's hang out and make a bowl of nachos" or something and sit down and watch a movie or something, like she still treated me the same.

> P3: I guess just were themselves and acted like ... never treated me like a professional athlete but just treated me like I always wanted to be treated, just treated me like (participant's name), you know. They never changed. And that, I guess, is a true way to find your friends. Because I wasn't playing anymore,

> everybody that I'd known before that or all my friends, I guess, still treated me the same way as if I was still playing. It sounds stupid, but there's a lot of people that are like that. There's a lot of people that I've met in the business that I'm sure would be "ah, he's not playing anymore, he's a nobody." So what? You know what I mean? And all my friends, my parents, my wife, have never ever treated me any differently than when I was playing. So I guess those are my true friends, the ones who take me for what I am and not who I am. So that was good.

The disappearance of 'acquaintances' seemed of less consequence with the presence of key friends:

> P2: Friends, as I had expected, they weren't out of the picture, when I was injured. It's not why they were my friends, I guess. The ones that mattered to me anyway. The other ones were more acquaintances, if you will, and if they weren't around, it wasn't any loss. But my friends, there was never all of a sudden a stand off approach. They didn't have trouble dealing with it, I don't think. So I was pretty lucky in that sense.

One function that one's social support could serve is helping the injured athlete to keep the loss of elite sport in perspective:

> P1: Yeah, I think my girlfriend and my parents helped me in that aspect a lot. I was away from home so I talked to them maybe once a week but you could tell they were always probing to see what my state of mind was and if I was depressed, they made every effort to say "it's just your hand, it's not your life, it's not your mind, your person's not going to suffer because of the injury." Not to focus too much on your injury, just focus on the good things in your life, like on your school and your friends and the people around you and stuff like that. I think they helped

me a lot that way. So did my girlfriend, She was always there to give you support and keep your self-esteem up as well.

... And sometimes she'd sit and say, "yeah, you know, you're probably not gonna play hockey again but there's more to you than being a hockey player. There's more to you than going on the ice and chasing the puck around, you know, you've got a lot more to offer someone than just being part of a team." I think she helped to put it in perspective too. But they were all pretty good, like they didn't harp on it and they didn't question me "well, are you gonna play again? Or do you think you'll play again? Or do you think you can play again?" They just said, you know, "just work hard at your physio, and take it day by day. And if it works out, it works out. And if it doesn't, then there's still a lot more to (name of participant) than just being a hockey player." So they were pretty good that way.

This contribution was clearly more appreciated than sympathy would have been:

P3: (About wife) Well, very supportive from the standpoint of ... it was a little hard knowing how I'd react I think, and she was sort of "It's all right, it's not, you know, your life isn't over" sort of thing. It wasn't ever "Oh, I really feel sorry for you" and kind of amplifying the fact that "oh, gee, everything that you were, you're not anymore".

Support was also helpful in providing encouragement to the participants, specifically to keep at the recovery and look toward the future:

P1: They could see my hand improving and they were always kind of interested in how I was doing so most of the people were giving positive reinforcement, like "yeah, keep at it, you're doing good, you're hand's coming back, it's gonna be fine.

...And with my girlfriend, you know, some days I was in a bad mood. She was always there to be a part of that and say "don't worry about it, you're doing fine, you're doing better than most people expected you to be doing in regards to your rehab, just keep at it."

P4: I actually got a beautiful letter from (name of coach). He gave me a lot of confidence. He was basically saying, like "(Name) was an awesome guy and basically he was the main guy and he could do it, and whatever challenges we gave him, he did it. And he'll always be successful." It's like, wow "he was a guy who was successful and people liked him", you know, it was a nice thing. It helped me out a lot.

P3: I guess the toughest thing for me was not going to the rink and I guess the biggest thing that she had done was, you know, she'd come home every day and try to get me going in the fact that "well, what did you do today? What are you gonna do tomorrow?" You know what I mean? Trying to set my own goals or trying to set my own little schedule up and stuff and ... instead of saying "ah, geez, everything will be all right" it was almost like, not so much a kick in the ass, but just like "what do you want to do?" Like "let's get going here" so that's, to me, that was the biggest thing that she gave was pushing me that way and saying "enjoy yourself and everything but what are you going to do? But it was always positive and everything. Just kind of planting the seed that "you'd better kind of set some goals for yourself and get going a little bit because you can't sit around forever". So it was good that way.

The role of one's support as listeners rather than talkers was also apparent:

P1: (Of one friend) He was kind of that impartial person that you could ask him something and he wouldn't be opinionated like "you should do this", he'd give you the two, three, four sides of the story the way he saw it and he wouldn't make the choice. But he was good to talk to as a sounding board to kind of put some things in perspective or stuff like that. He was very good. He was helpful.

P3: Yeah, I was married in August of that year, the same time I retired and I think that was a big help. Because I had someone there helping to support me and, you know, once in a while you need a kick in the ass to get yourself going, and the was there to do it and she was there also to comfort me too, at the same time, when I needed someone to talk to about it and say, like, this is hard. And maybe that's why right now I think that it was a smooth transition, because of those factors. You know, I never really did have any bad, bad times.

However, there was a general reluctance to talk too much about it because of the fear that it was bringing everybody else down:

P1: It kind of annoyed me at times the fact that they would say, you know, well, "our season's gone down the drain because we lost you. It's not going to be the same in the dressing room", like, I didn't want to hear that. It made me feel like this whole thing's gonna bring everybody down. I didn't want that. I didn't want them to feel what I was feeling.

P2: I have shared with you more than, most ... all of my friends. Knowing that you're gonna walk away and my name is not going to be attached to this. There's no way I would share this kind of stuff with people near me. And I think there is a benefit or some security in distance. And from that end, as well, getting your life back, this person doesn't have anything to gain. They're not just saying it to be

more of a friend because they feel they have to say something because they're my Mom or Dad or cousin Louie or whatever.

P1: I don't know, like I said to you before, I think you're the first person that I've really ever sat down and talked about my emotions that I went through. I haven't until now really. I think it's a lot easier to talk to someone that you know it's in confidence, than it is to talk to someone that you have a different relationship with, like a close friend or parent or teammate or something like that. It's certainly different, like, I don't know, growing up with sport, for me, like you don't, I don't know if it's just a male sport thing or if it's a North American sport thing, but you're taught not to show your emotions.

In light of this fear, the interaction that two participants had with sport psychologists (who were not immersed in the athlete's environment) appears to have been quite beneficial. These professionals were able to foster positive outlooks for the future:

P2: Well, one of the most helpful people, that you just walk away from the guy with a big smile on your face because you feel good about yourself, is (name of psychologist). God, he's unbelievable, you know, he just makes you feel good about yourself. One of the big hang-ups that I had was I didn't have this worth on my brain, you know, I didn't have anything else to give. So I always felt, "oh, I need more schooling, I need to go back to school, I guess I need to do this, I need to do that". And he just kept saying, "well, why? You don't really need to. You're this kind of guy," after going through some aptitude tests. And he said "you do have these certain skills", in interviews with him. "It's not critical, you don't have to do that." And I didn't really believe him, you know "he's just saying that to make me feel better." But it made a whole lot of sense, and then it started

to come true, so now I always think back at what he said, and you know, it was bang on. I have suggested that other people see him as well.

P3: He's great. I'll tell you what, I learned a lot from him. He's helped me out over the years.
Interviewer: How would you say he helped you the most?
In that fact of looking ahead instead of looking back.
Interviewer: Keeping perspective?
Yeah. Never look back.

In addition to avoiding the expression of sympathy, one might also steer clear of pretending to 'know' what the athlete is going through without the benefit of experience. This participant was quite forgiving but clearly annoyed with the attempt to relate to a previous loss:

P2: Like my dad died, and the stupid comments you get after the funeral. "Oh, I know what you're going through. I lost my dog when I was 12." Like that's the stupidest thing you could ever imagine saying. But this person is grieving too, in their own way, and they're trying ... your whole life you try to relate experiences back to the ones you've had. And that's the only thing this person could come up with. Fair enough, great for them, they haven't had to deal with this stuff, and hopefully they'll be older and it'll be easier for them and all that but ... come on. But I wasn't bitter that they had said something so stupid. They just didn't know. Again, just relating it to their own experiences so I never held it against anybody. They were just trying to help the only way they could.

Internal Coping

One vital piece of the adjustment process appears to have been achieved by exercising some conscious control over subsequent thoughts about the injury, its meaning and implications for the future. This mental vigilance might best be described as a personal philosophy adopted to 'process' adversity in a healthy, adaptive manner. For example, participants were generally careful not to entertain thoughts of "what if this hadn't happened to me?":

> P1: I didn't want to be reminded of, like you said, 'you could have' because it was never gonna happen. Like, it was part of your personal history that wasn't gonna be anymore and you didn't want to be reminded of "well, this might have happened".

> P2: I only played two games in my 5th. Well, you and I both can say woulda, coulda, shoulda, and if only this and if only that. It's a waste of time. It's a waste of energy. In any part of life, whether you're facing a career ending injury or gee if only this guy would have done this then I would have done that as well. Waste of time. Woulda, coulda, shoulda. You know, you're going to get emotionally all bummed about it. You're not gonna change anything. Don't go there.
> ... So you know, it's a big waste of time. Why beat yourself up over it? What are you changing? What are you making of it? Nothing. You're just beating yourself up.

> P3: I guess you always stop and wonder, and say, what if I still had my sight? Where would I be right now? There's always that question, but there's one thing that I try to do is I try not to ask that question ever. I try to live every day in the present and I don't live anything in the past. And I look ahead. I don't look too

> far ahead in the future, that's gonna hurt you, but I don't ever live in the past, at all.
>
> ... I never said that (what if). Not once. I've got an old saying. "If 'if's' and 'but's' were candies and nuts, it'd be a merry f---ing Christmas." You know what I mean? I've never said once, I've never, ever, ever said to myself "geez, what if I was still playing right now?" You know, like, I'm not. I don't care. I don't say that.

Indulging in such thoughts seems to cause unnecessary distress, even long after the fact:

> P4: But to have it end the way I did, I still have people asking me, "did you make it to camp?" "No, I never even made it to camp". I never ran the 40. I never did the bench press. I never made the interceptions. I never made the plays. It something that, it was difficult. Really, when I think about it now and talk about it, it's difficult to talk about. But really, you know, talking about it now, I mean, what the hell did I work for all my life? That's what it was about. You know, and I'll tell ya, what can you do? You know? So that's the tough part.

Instead, the athletes were determined to look forward and make the most of the future:

> P2: You've got to play your cards. They're your cards. You can't trade your hand in, you know. Every now and then someone might pluck a card from you. Your card might be the ability to play hockey or football, but you've got to play what you've got left.
>
> P3: Yeah, you can't look in the past, because if you look in the past, everything in front of you and at the time is gonna pass you by. You're gonna miss it.

... Yeah, the biggest thing about it is looking ahead and not in the past. You can't sit around moping your whole life. Just deal with it when it happens and move on. ... The biggest thing is to ... it was just a matter of "life's gonna pass you by, keep going". I mean. it's like driving down the road, and there's a detour, what are you gonna do? You're gonna take the detour and live with it. So it holds you up for another ten minutes. As far as I'm concerned, big deal. You know, you'll make that time up on the highway. You know what I mean? That's kind of my approach.

Another strategy that allowed the athletes to cope was to focus their thoughts on positives:

P1: Yeah, I try to devote my energy and my thoughts to things that make me feel good, make me feel positive or that used to before and keep looking at those things and still there's one piece of the pie, one void that's not being filled but you just learn to cope with it try to get satisfaction from the things that you always did before, things that were enjoyable for you in the past.

P2: If you've got to go through life and you just get all p---ed off at all the things that don't happen for you, and all the things that don't work out, then f---, you must be one miserable son of a b----, you know. If that's all you're going to focus on, I don't want to hang out with you. Why would I? You're gonna be so negative. You're gonna be so bitter. I just get frustrated with people who bitch and complain all the time about what they're not given. I try not to hang around with those people. They're just not much fun.

P3: I feel very fortunate that I got to play in the NHL. Every day I feel very fortunate because I had an opportunity to make a good living, make some money

for my family, and meet a tremendous amount of interesting people, and actually learn a lot about the game, through different people, and different perspectives of the game. You know, I feel very fortunate for that. And I still have a lot of good friends that I keep in contact with, but not once do I sit back and sit in my chair and say "geez, you know, what if, you know, I could play..." I watch T.V., I watch hockey games as a fan. I don't watch them as "ah, geez, I should be playing". I think it's too long to live if you're sour on something every day. I just, hey, it was a privilege to play there, I feel fortunate for the amount of time I played, and let's move on. Because you can't spin your wheels in the mud all day. Something's gonna burn out sooner or later, you know.
... I've got everything to thank for what I've done. You know, I don't say anything lousy about what happened to me or the game or the sport or anything, you know.

P4: But I look at it as, at least I was able to play four years of college. And I had fun. I had some injuries. I met some great people along the way and some great friends. And, you know, I was able to at least do something, you know. Because it's better than not even going. I could easily have not even gone to university.
... Had I played in the CFL and had a four year career, three year career, I wouldn't be where I am today as far as my business. Because I grew up in a hot market. When I got into the stock market, it was the start of a boom. And it rocked, and anyone who was in the market was making money. Had I spent six months of the year playing football, and tried to make money on the side, here and there, I would have never succeeded financially.

P1: I went through hockey every year, into baseball every summer, and hockey in the winter, into baseball ... But now, it's like you have so much more time to do other things, things that you would never have previously gotten to do. You get

> an opportunity to really enjoy yourself and enjoy your friends outside the sport. Enjoy the experiences that are out there besides just traveling to the rink, to the hotel, rink to the hotel.

One participant was able to channel his competitiveness into the healing process, effectively focusing on the future:

> P1: My physio was what I kind of put my athletic interests into and the competitiveness of an athlete, I transferred that from the hockey to my physio and my rehab to get my ability back in my hand. So I still had some sense of competition but it was against myself.
> ... "Well maybe I won't get my feeling back and maybe I won't get my full functionability back in my hand. But it's not going to be from lack of effort. I'm going to put my efforts and strengths and time into it and not skip", so it was similar to being an athlete but I took that focus and transferred it into my physio and my rehab.

Another effective approach was to frame the injury within the broader picture in order to gain some perspective:

> P1: A day or two goes by, and you realize you still have your friends, you realize your parents still love you, you realize your girlfriend, at the time, she's still gonna be there for you and you realize, you know, ... 90% of my life is still the same. There's just this one little facet of my life that I can't play anymore but everything else is the same. So I kind of look at it in the broader perspective and say "well yeah, sure this is gone, but look at how much I still have, you know, and then the part that's gone, temporarily, I can always shoot to get that back. If I do, I do,

> that's great, and my life is back 'so called' the way it was. But if I don't, then I still have the majority of my life is still very much the same.
> ... I think, after a few days you sit back and say "this person still talks to me, I still go here with these friends," and you just put it in perspective and say there's more to it than putting on the equipment and skating on the ice for an hour a day. You know, there's still another 23 hours in your day that your life is pretty much the same.

For this same participant, maintaining balance throughout his life afforded him a broader focus with multiple positives to draw from:

> P1: I guess the old saying goes "it makes my Dad look awfully smart". Because he always said "keep that balance. Don't go off to your sport and forget everything else. Keep your academics, your friends, your family, everything in balance" which I think was the best advice that he could really give me because during the injury, it was actually my school and my friends and my family that taught me that there was more to my life than that. And I mean, academic/sport balance was super important because, otherwise, I don't think I'd be (where I am) right now, doing a masters degree.

One athlete was able to gain perspective in light of how bad the injury outcome could have been:

> P2: S--- was happening where you get people coming in and crying in your room. They're not sure if you're gonna live or die and that sort of s---. Waking up at 3 in the morning, seeing all these lab coats around my bed, knowing, at the XXX hospital there can't possibly be this many doctors at 3 am, ...f--- I must be sick (laughs). I remember lying in that bed thinking "I'm never gonna use this leg

again." ... Some kid in the bed next to me, his father came in. He saw I was upset and he said "do you mind if I pray for you?" And he went on for four minutes of Spanish I'm assuming, I don't know what language it was. He had his eyes closed and his hands crossed and just started praying. And I got really emotional. A guy I don't even know is trying to help out in his way and I'm feeling mighty low and ... that was an experience right there. It really was.

... I get out and golf and every time I'm having a really bad round, I think of the day I'm in the hospital bed and can't feel the bottom half of my leg, and I've got a guy, I have no idea what he's saying, praying. Could be a lot worse. And that's when I hit the next ball. Could be a lot worse. And then I don't care anymore. You know, then I don't get all upset about always slicing or hooking or always duffing, because, you know, I was not that far away from not being out here at all.

The participants all agreed that their experiences had strengthened them in some way and were able to see their losses as key determinants of who they are now:

P4: I think we all become stronger as we grow older. And all the experiences we go through make us stronger. And definitely, that made me stronger.
Interviewer: So you have more confidence to deal with things as they come now?
I think so.

P3: Everybody goes through adversity, it's just how much ... how well you can deal with it, how well you can get around it or get through it, and how strong you are. I think that it's healthy to have a lot of adversity. It just makes you a better person, a stronger person.

P1: It shows that, you know, your friends are still gonna be there, no matter what happens to you. Really, you're who you are, with or without ... one part of your

> life is not gonna change the character of you or what people think of you. So, yeah, it totally made me stronger and it's taught me a lot about dealing with adversity and talking to people in general too. I mean, everyone kind of wanted to know "what happened" or "how do you feel?" or "do you think you can come back?" It also helped to talk to people about what you're feeling and what you went through to where I am now.

However, one participant, while acknowledging the strength that he had developed, felt that he had dealt with more than his share of adversity and was beginning to question the value of further 'character builders':

> P2: But when someone made the comment, that which does not kill you makes you stronger, and I thought, f---, you know, I'm just so strong from this stuff that hasn't killed me yet, but I'm tired of having to rely on that strength. I'd kind of like to have some easy time for a while. I'd like to coast here. I don't want to keep running into the wind. I'm getting a little tired.

Two of the participants felt they were able to make sense of their experiences as fitting into a grand scheme of things:

> P3: I'm a big believer that things happen for a reason. They don't just happen. They happen for a reason. And I think if someone believes that then that's half the battle.

> P4: A lot of it was through God and through religion. That's probably the biggest thing. In my religion, we're taught to always be thankful, and always look to how lucky we are. We don't always look at the negatives and always say "why did

God do this to me?" We say "this is what God wanted. This is what God wanted me to do. And this is the way my life was supposed to be."

Unfortunately, this same religious faith may well have added to the sense of loss because of what he felt his athletic career may have contributed to others of his faith:

P4: I always thought, for my religion and my culture, it would be good that this (name of participant), who was a football player, was giving a chance to other (religious faith) kids in the community. And he has a (religious faith) name. I was proud to actually say "there's a (religious faith) kid, from (home city), who plays in the CFL. That was always something that was inspirational to me and others in the community were inspired by that.

3.) Filling the 'Void'

Once the athlete has come to terms with what has been lost, he/she can start to refill the voids that have been left. The development and/or maintenance of feelings of competence, positive affiliations, physicality, and satisfaction can provide for the individual what was formerly provided by sport.

Feelings of Competence

When one can no longer depend on sport as a primary sense of competence and achievement, a question emerges as to how those feelings can be achieved:

P4: Where do I go with those great habits you learn? Where do you go with it? And what do you do? I wasn't much of a student.

That this issue is of primary importance was also reflected in some comments:

> P2: I feel that, if I don't find this worth in my career, then I'm not gonna be very happy at home anyway. I'm not gonna be providing a good environment if I'm there and miserable.
> ... My comment that I'm still an athlete even though I'm not, you still think of yourself in some way as an athlete. That's sort of where you're shifting that competence feeling to another area, where you're redefining your self-esteem somehow.

> P4: I was a little frustrated, but I just dealt with it by trying to succeed somewhere else. That was probably the biggest motivation: to succeed somewhere else.

Therefore out of necessity, participants directed energy towards developing skills, which in turn initiated an upswing in affect and feelings of self-worth:

> P1: I looked more towards my future outside hockey as opposed to my future in hockey. I kind of changed my focus... my life I guess in a sense. I wasn't looking for hockey anymore as kind of a crutch to get me through university with regards to funding or scholarships or stuff like that. I was just focusing on my schooling. And started really excelling at my school so that kind of gave me some of my sense of self and my psychological well-being in the sense that there were other things outside of hockey, kind of made me realize that.
> ... I'd say I'm happier in the sense that my academics are going as well as they are. I knew previously that I was going to be in attending school and it was going to progress hopefully into a career or job or whatever. But I think I'm happier now that I'm closer to that.

... That's kind of where I put my energies elsewhere, once, you know, hockey was done, so I had all this time free and I used all those other areas to gain some self-confidence, some self-worth back, and realize that I can gain some satisfaction from other things outside the hockey.

P2: You've got to jump on a steep learning curve again in a different career. But, it worked falling into this when I found out I really enjoy it. It's going pretty well. ... Just doing this job and getting it figured out, where I can see that I am helping a fair number of people. I feel pretty good about that. I'm starting to feel that I do add value to their situations and it helps me along the way, obviously, I can get paid for it as well, which is nice that you can tie those two things together. But I feel confident now in what I do and I'm gonna be all right at doing it. So I'm feeling good about that.

P3: So I applied for the job here (coaching), knowing that I know the game pretty well, I've played it, but it's a different aspect of dealing with these kids every day.

In one case, the athlete stayed within the sport as a coach and felt that he was able to derive some expertise from his playing experiences:

P3: I'm very fortunate that I could stay in the industry and do that. Like, I don't know how to pound a nail, you know, like how could I be a carpenter? I'd have to start from zero, you know, right from the ground up. Whereas now, I'm in the business where I'm more familiar with it, I've been through my life, and it's a privilege for me too to be in this position.
... And I think that's why I'm so happy. Because I don't really know anything else. Born and bred hockey, and fortunate that I could stay in the game.

As this sense of personal competence is restored, one can see the benefits of renewed confidence and self-esteem:

> P2: I'm just more comfortable in my abilities and what I do that I don't think there's too many people that are gonna come around that are gonna look that much better than me that I'm gonna look really stupid and look like I don't know what I'm doing. I'm sure it's like anything, when you're new at something, you're just a little unsure of yourself and you just have to get your feet under you. As soon as you get your feet under you, you have your confidence and away you go. I have lots of confidence now. You do it enough times and I feel good about what I do. I think I do a good job. My clients are pretty happy.
> ... I have other potential. I have other skills. And I'm not the sharpest knife in the drawer, but I'm not the dullest either. It was a realization of other talents, I guess, which is a good thing.

Affiliation

Considering the time and energy that goes into elite sport, it is not surprising that the relationships within it are strong and difficult to replace. Despite efforts to fill this gap, it was clear that this was still an issue with some participants:

> P1: But I still think that I'd like to have a group of friends some time, I think we have it in our faculty but it's not an everyday kind of relationship where it happens everyday, where you're building that relationship and you're having those laughs everyday, it's more sporadic. It's a party here or playing hockey or playing intramurals, you kind of get some of that sense but it's not as close, basically because they're just different people.

P4: In my case, the camaraderie was huge. But I've been a lucky guy because I have quite a few neat little friends, so I was able to maintain a camaraderie amongst some people. But without a doubt, it's a huge part of it. I was the kind of person who likes the group. I like a team. So when the team is no longer a part of your life, you feel like something is missing.

P2: I tried flag (football) and I played every other game on (player's name)'s team, with those guys. And the only reason I did it was because I used to play with 'the guys'. It's what you miss. You talk to a lot of the former players and that's what they miss, is hanging out with the boys. I remember being in the press box with (scout's name). And we were in the press box and the game was over. The boys had pulled one out. He just pointed towards the locker room. And he didn't have to come out and say everything because we both just knew exactly what it is.

Players have common goals, values, and experiences. This basis for friendship is a solid one but is not exclusive to the active athlete. Participants had friendships after sport of a similar quality:

P2: Because I didn't have a lot of family here when I was alone, I've developed some very, very deep friendships. I believe strongly in always being close to those people. I sort of found some people, by luck or choice, from similar family backgrounds, which were not particularly rosy. And we just sort of found each other. 'Brothers', if you will. And if they move away, we're still on the phone once a week, and now email helps. They're like, they're my family. I really think of them that way.

... The alumni was good for that. It was certainly good for me, joining them right away. I would say through my alumni and hanging out with those guys, we're all a bunch of has-beens, you know. It's good to hang out with those guys. And

there are guys you tend to gravitate to, like yourself, within that group. Yeah, they play a role for me. I've been the treasurer for the last couple years too so I'm fairly active with them as well.

P3: I don't know what the common bond would be, I guess friendship. Personality. I like to think that we're pretty fun people, that we like to have a good time. And a good time could be anything, you know. So I guess personality is the common bond between all our friends. It's just a friendship. It's a friendship thing rather than a financial thing or a sports thing. And some of your friends turn up because of hockey or maybe even work or whatever, but if they're true friends, they turn out to be friends because of your personality and because of who you are.

... My friends are very important to me, and I've always been that way.

And exit from sport did not necessarily mark the end of those strong relationships:

P1: I'm pretty lucky that I still have (name of roommate), who I played with, so we still talk amongst ourselves or talk about the guys that we hung out with when we played university hockey. So we still have that connection.

... Sure I'm not in that circle of friends that I had as a hockey player and as tight as I was before, but they're still all my friends. I can still talk to them. I can still talk the same hockey talk as I could before. I don't necessarily step on the ice and play at that level with them as a team, but I can still be part of the team. They all still considered me a part of the team that year.

Feelings of belonging and friendship were not necessarily restricted to in-sport friends. Friends outside of sport were seen as very important:

P3: When we were in (name of city), we had a lot of friends that didn't play hockey, and that was very important to me, and as a matter of fact, the guys I went snowmobiling with this weekend are not in the hockey business. All in their own little worlds and doing stuff. So to me I think that's great. And that's very important because, to a professional athlete, basically you have yourself and your teammates. You don't let a lot of other people into your circle because you're not sure what kind of friends they are. But that was always important to me, when I was playing, to have friends outside the hockey community, because I felt that you need that. You need to get away from the game.

P1: In general, I had other pockets of friends. Even my friends at home, even though I wasn't there with them, I knew they were always going to be my friends and I could still talk to them on the phone. Like I said, I had two or three different pockets of friends, and I didn't lose that pocket of friends that I had during hockey, but I wasn't as involved with them anymore, everyday. Like, everyday, in and out, two or three hours a day, that block of time was always with them. I mean, sure I was with them outside the rink sometimes, but I can say I had the other two, three, four pockets that the relationships were still there and they hadn't changed. That's definitely one of the things that helped me through it.

Developing one's own family also provided bonds and experiences of clear significance:

P2: That wasn't why she married me, because I was a football player. So, I think some guys will go through that because they have these trophy wives that are lovely peroxide blondes that look great but the only reason they're there is because you've got a name. And when the name ain't there, well, neither are they. And that wasn't why we got married, I guess. She didn't choose me for that reason, I guess.

... Well, I can't tell you how much I like horsing around with the kids. We're a wrestling team. I get home and right away it's "Daddy, let's wrestle." They're very important and my friends are very important as well. It's important to ... I love people. People are fun. And it's nice that you can go home to people that you love and enjoy their company as well, and work at it. It's not always easy, of course, but it's fun when you see the outcome in the form of children.

Physicality

The importance of physicality to the participants was clearly expressed. Having spent the first part of their lives with very high levels of activity, limits resulting from injury can represent a significant loss. The repercussions for quality of life and self-concept are evident:

P2: I was able to do things physically to the point of complete exhaustion, which was a wonderful feeling. And I can never do that again. You get tired but that's not where you put your body and soul into something and at the end of the game you're just (collapsing motion). I can't do that anymore, because my back just says "nope, I don't think we're gonna do this." And the rest of me is still wanting to go but I can't.

... Remembering that it was not my goal from a wee lad to play professional sports. It just sort of happened. I was an athlete and I just loved to play. And that's, today, more of a bigger struggle. I can't play. You know, this weekend, during the day, I was probably lying down about six hours. I buggered it up again. ... And the next thing will be what I'm limited to in sharing and participating with my children, when I won't be able to do that. My father was never able to do that with me because he'd had a bum leg and he couldn't ride a bike or anything like that, let alone skate or anything. I didn't want that to happen to me, but it's sort

of, I hope it won't be as bad as what he was, but yeah, that kind of bums me out a little bit. Recognizing I can't do this, I can't do that, it's just an ongoing frustration. It's like "f---, will it ever end?". And it won't, you know. Just when you start feeling a little bit better and do stuff, you do something stupid, like get out of a car and pull your back for no reason at all, and it brings you right back to "you know, I am not the same guy." The frustration is always there. It's hard to say you get used to it.

...But my whole life, I was an athlete. And that was the hard part, not doing a lot of things. Like I would have loved to have retired healthy and played things like rugby.

P4: Some of those stages (of difficulty) were not always training and being active, in terms of being in a situation where you're not always committed to something, it's tough because you have a void in your life.

... Something that's really missing in my life is those good workouts, those two-hour workouts. Those were great. Of course as the body gets older, you can't quite do the same thing.

In contrast, maintaining a reasonable level of physical activity appears to be beneficial for one's self-image:

P4: For me working out is a small thing for me, that I can do, that brings me the pleasure. Especially going out with the old guys from the past, I mean, it just, it's a nice feeling. And the best part about it is, we can still go in the weight room and people say "oh, you're still in good shape", I mean, I'm never a guy that will have that taken away from me, ever. Because we're too young, and we can still be in good shape when we're forty, you know, so I want to continue to be in the shape I was in, in the old days.

P1: It all started for me in physio, just the fact that I was doing something and still working towards something, and once I was able to get back and do normal weight training and do other things like that, it was something that I needed to do just for my own self-worth, you know, to be comfortable with myself. While I used to be in this type of shape, I can still be in that type of shape when I'm not playing sports. That part of you is still the same and it's something that you associate with you as being a part of you.

... You know, for me, I can still do that, I can still play. I mean, sure it's not at the same level, but I mean, I can still go there and skate and know that I'm interacting with a bunch of people and that I'm doing something that's physically good for me, you know, my heart, my body, all that kind of stuff, and just, I can still do the majority of stuff that I could do before. I'm lucky in the sense that I can still do that, I guess, in comparison to some others who maybe can't.

One participant no longer felt the need to train with the intensity that he used to, but gained satisfaction from an active lifestyle:

P3: I'm not working out so much in the fact that, you know, you're on the bike or you're on the treadmill, or anything ... but going, like trying to get in the dressing room and talking to players and walking around and then, on the ice, real active. And then, once practice was over, I guess, a lot of times I'd be out there screwing around a little bit, so that was pretty active, but nothing in the fact that I'd get on the stationary bike for an hour and work out that way. So I guess I consider myself active. In the summer time, I walk, golfing all the time, so I guess I consider myself active that way, but not in the fact where it was really regimented when I played. It's almost like ... from when I was 16 until I was twenty-five, I worked hard, hard, hard in the summertime and during the winter. And it's almost

now like, I sacrificed all that then, so I'm not gonna sacrifice it anymore. So I guess that's about how active I am.

The ability to do certain physical things can preserve the athlete's sense of being able-bodied or physically competent:

P1: And I've gotten back into working out too, and I can do that pretty much the same way I could before. My grip strength is down a bit but for the most part it's functioning enough that I can do as much weight as I used to be able to before, so that kind of works on your mind to say, you know, my hand is still functioning. It's not like it's useless or I'm not a gimp or whatever. (laughs)

P4: And now, about three years later, I'm starting to get to that strength where, after the years of a little bit of training, especially the more serious training I've been doing in the last six months, I'm feeling like I could almost do something like that (play elite sport).

... It was tough. I mean, the good thing is, now I'm twenty-nine and I'm healthy. And it's incredible, I can sit down, I can stand up, I can jog, I can do squats, I can do lunges. And it's amazing how, five years ago, I was struggling just to do those little things.

Another participant acknowledged that he hadn't done much to fulfill that need to be physically active, but insisted that the need was still pressing:

P1: This hockey thing is a good thing but I don't train for it or ... I have to try to make time for it, and just seeing more what I can do. But there's a drive to play. I can't just go work out. You don't get the same satisfaction from working out as playing a game of something: pick up basketball or a game of squash or whatever.

> Yeah, I've got to find something to help me satisfy that part of me. I don't know what it is that's holding me back from trying to find something. Whether it's just here (work), focusing here, again the imbalance issue, or somewhere in my mind, I'm trying to shut this other part off and really focus on this one. I don't know. ... I guess you just try to get comfortable with what you can do, rather than focusing on what you can't.

The presence of chronic pain can also aggravate the quality of one's physical experience, as is evident for this participant:

> P2: On the injury side of things, I guess ... it still hurts, you know, physically. I'm tired of being in pain all the time. I really am. It gets you down. I just think, f---, how am I ever gonna get over this? And it's very tiring. It really is. It's a simple word but it's very tiring. Just having to grit your teeth and suck it up all the time. You can't see an end to ... well there is no end, which is depressing in its own right. But it's always gonna be there.

Redefining Satisfaction

For the elite athlete, what is experienced as fulfilling, satisfying, and enjoyable can also be limited primarily to athletic competition. Despite other positive activities, the 'high' or climax of competition can be sorely missed by the former athlete:

> P1: I get very excited when I know I can go on the ice or interact, like with the tutoring program, to go there with the children and, you know, help them out. I get excited but it's kind of a, it's almost like a plateau of excitement, like there's a certain level you reach being around them but there are very few peaks in that sense of satisfaction or the excitement of being there. Whereas hockey had some

huge ups and huge downs and, you know, I don't find that I get the same climax of emotional energy or fulfillment from anything right now.

P2: Last year was a big year for me in my career. And I made a whack of money. A lot more than I did playing football, that's for sure. About two or three times. It was a really good year and I had a peak with it but as far as the thrill you get out of it, you don't have the physical exhaustion to go along with the mental sense of accomplishment. It's kind of hard to do that with a desk job, to get that physical part of it. And that's what athletics is; you actually put those things together.

But it was also possible for some to shift from an individual achievement focus to a more facilitative or altruistic focus, providing a satisfaction of a different type:

P1: With hockey, usually you look back and go this is my hard work and my perseverance that gave me the ability to do this and this is my athletic abilities as opposed to your organizational or your coaching abilities. It's still a different kind of high, I mean, they're pretty comparable but they're just, I don't know, different sides of the coin. They're different types of satisfaction. ...
... The satisfaction of the tutoring, helping out the kids, or through the coaching, was totally fun for me. Like you say, it's a different level of satisfaction, but it's still, well, not a different level, but a different kind. And in a sense, it's almost better sometimes than the small periodical one that you have through hockey, whereas this one builds up and builds up and builds up and then, towards the end, you really see the difference that you made and it's almost like a different type of satisfaction.

Unfortunately, one participant's experience with children could not replace the fulfillment he knew as an athlete:

P2: You take them to their lessons and watch them do stuff. I do enjoy that. But I'm not an active participant in that. Rather I'm just trying to provide the forum for the gymnastics or soccer. What I'm struggling with is ... that(athletic fulfillment) was there, this (children) is over here. I'm enjoying this but I'm still missing this. So I'm not completely satisfied yet because now I just have this. I have this but I want that too. I mean, I'm enjoying this for what it is but what I'm having trouble with is "well, that's okay, we'll just shift over here". I can't honestly say that that's me yet.

A shift to a more facilitative role can provide satisfaction in knowing that one can 'give back' to a sport that was very good to the athlete:

P1: But I think I'll always have the urge to go back and give something back to the children, whether it be in baseball or in hockey, it'll be in order to help, you know, to have an outreach program for the less fortunate or something like that. I find that I get a lot of personal satisfaction out of helping out and being around those children and watching them learn and grow. I think that's something that I'll always do. That's just something that I get a lot of satisfaction out of.
... , I was on the ice a lot with him (friend who runs camps), training hockey players, running practices, evaluating kids. So I enjoyed that, it was nice to be back around the game and to talk hockey with guys that played it. You know, be on the ice and be able to help kids out, spread a little bit of the knowledge that you have, give a little back basically. It was pretty fulfilling too. You know, to be around kids is pretty unpredictable. It's fun just teasing or playing around with them and play with them sometimes, jump into the scrimmages and fool around, stuff like that. It's fulfilling for me to get back with the young guys and to coach the kids and help them out, and try to give a little insight to them out of the game.

P3: I think that's what maybe I get the rush from is, like right now we're on a five game unbeaten streak. I get the rush because I'm so happy for those kids. I don't give a s--- about myself. I mean, I've worried about myself for so long. It's so nice to see those kids faces at the end of a game, come down that hall with a big, s--- -eatin' grin on their face, knowing that they kicked some ass and beat somebody, you know. I don't care about myself. It's a great feeling for those kids. I get a lot of enjoyment out of that. Like, the enjoyment of winning, for me, is not the two points that we get. Like I said, seeing those kids come into the room, just pumped, so happy that they've won the game, you know.

Satisfaction can also come from helping young athletes or students to develop, grow, and pursue their own potential:

P1: It's not selfish because you're giving so much to other people and you measure your satisfaction by how well you think they're doing and what they've gained from the program. Sometimes I think it's even better to know that you were able to touch that many people and to see them improve. It's a good feeling. Now I kind of look upon myself not how I can improve myself but how I can spread what I know or the experiences that I've had I can pass on to others and help them improve, help them feel good about themselves. And that's how I measure how good I am at that is what I see from my influence, the effects of my time and influence.

P2:L Last year I coached my daughter's soccer team. I got a kick out of that. That was fun. I want to coach a different daughter this year. So try to have some fun. I mean, I do enjoy that sort of stuff. I like watching them all of a sudden realize their potential, where they didn't think they could do that certain gymnastic

> move or ... Saturday morning soccer games, watching them kick a ball. I mean, I enjoy watching them do that. But I enjoy that. I really enjoy watching them grow and helping them read and all that stuff. And I read night time stories. I feel better balanced than perhaps my own family was when I was a kid, but it doesn't take much.
>
> P3: We have some kids on this team that I think could play potentially someday at the NHL level. Somehow I've got to get across to these kids in the next two years how to work and what to expect. And that gives me more satisfaction, seeing those kids pat their goalie on the head at the end of the game in a win, like I don't feel like I was the one that did it. I just feel great happiness that they're the ones that can go out there and do it. That makes me feel good.

However, it should be noted that this altruistic focus can be its own form of personal development:

> P3: Every day (coaching) has been a learning experience, every day that I'm here. And I've learned something new every day and it's been great. I absolutely love it.

For the athlete who is open to new experiences or new ways of looking at old ones, the conception of what is fulfilling or satisfying can be broadened and modified to the opportunities of the former athlete:

> P1: I think there's a lot of self-satisfaction from doing well in school or meeting new people in school too, you know, meeting new friends there and school's a new way to gain satisfaction. And like I said, in the future, I'm sure I'll get back into it in the coaching sense too, so I think I'll get some satisfaction that way. But now, I don't know, I gain satisfaction from different things. I think, like I gain a

lot more satisfaction from doing a lot more outdoor things, like regular recreation, not so much high end or high performance type sporting events, like I get fun out of playing in our softball league in the summer. It's not so competitive, it's more on the fun of it, or to go there and know that you're going there to socialize and, you know, maybe you will make a good play or maybe you won't, but if it does happen, that's great. If it doesn't happen, it's no big loss. It's not like you failed, or you're not keeping up the scoring race, it's just, it's totally recreation, it's fun. I mean, you're still playing sports. It's a similar environment, but it's not the pressure, you don't go there with the same expectations as you would when you were playing at an elite level.

... You can have just as much fun at, I don't know, reading a book sometimes, you know. Some books make your hair stand up, if it's something that you really enjoy. Some experiences, like going hiking in the woods, or just something like that with a group of people can be as much fun, or funner, as playing your sport.

4.) Pursuing a New Passion or Challenge

Perhaps the most vital piece of the adjustment puzzle, according to the participants in this study, was the presence of some new direction to which one could devote his efforts. A new challenge or field that the individual was passionate about could both pull the athlete out of his down period and provide a vision for the future. As such, this component of adjustment can be influential throughout the process. It can also provide the impetus for development of competence, affiliation, physical activity, and feelings of satisfaction (as represented in Figure 4).

In helping to deal with the loss of sport, another pursuit was found to provide a useful distraction for some participants:

P3: And another thing too which was kind of funny is after the retirement, we bought a dog in October, and I trained the dog, so I was with the dog every day, for six or seven months. So that's another job that I had, I guess, that I bonded with a dog. This dog was like having a kid almost, you know. So that sort of took my mind off of things too, and I spent six months training him. You know, stupid as it sounds, some people might that's not, you know, but it's tough, and that kept my mind off of things too. So he was good for me, you know.

P2: I was fortunate in that I had another job to focus on, so it wasn't that I was left without anything to do, without a purpose, without some direction. So that was easier, I think, where I could focus on my work at the bank. I was back to work as soon as I could, focusing and just trying to carry on. Whether that helped me ignore other things, I don't know, but arguably yeah. And I guess, having that other focus really helped.

A new challenge can also provide a motivating force to break out of the period of low energy and inactivity. In other words, it can provide a reason to 'get moving':

P4: And a young friend, at the time of my difficulty, was making a million dollars on the stock market, 23 years old. And he was teaching me, as he was going through his success, he really was telling me about it. I loved to hear about it. And I was, of course, motivated to start doing what he was doing. So now, I've maybe found a new goal in life: To be successful financially and get into the stock market business. And through this friend, I was really able to try to chase a new challenge.

... So, you know, how I deal with it is I deal with the next challenge. If it happened to me when I was going to Uof(X) I probably would have dropped out of school. I mean, it could have been a nightmare. Believe me. The

fact that I at least graduated, had a degree, and was looking for new challenges. Luckily it made things a little easier, but believe me, it was tough.

... Interviewer: How important was it for you, in your recovery, to kind of just back up on the horse with a new challenge?

Very important. Absolutely necessary. I always needed to succeed. And for me, at that point in time, it was in real life. Now you're the man, let's see what you can do.

... I think the other positive was that that I found this new business, this new playing field and this business that I'm in. It kind of took my thoughts and my time and my dedication. But believe me, if I didn't end up finding anything else, it could have been a disaster, that's for sure.

... I think I could have easily gotten hopeless, but finding a friend who was successful as a stockbroker, making a lot of money, kind of gave me new light, a new challenge. A new kind of place to ... a new playing field really.

Clearly, having something to work toward was of central importance to these athletes. It can lend meaning and value to the individual's experience:

P4: Yeah, I think life is empty for a lot of us if it's not there. That's why I told you about the money. Money doesn't bring you happiness, it's the passion in trying to succeed and trying to for better things is the motivation, not so you can buy nicer things, nicer clothes. It's the passion of succeeding. It's the constant challenge, it's a constant pressure, but it's what keeps us going.

P1: That's what makes you step out of that hole, to realize that that's there and that's kind of how you've been all your life, so you may not do it in the ball park, or on the basketball court, or on the track, or whatever, but you've got to find something and realize that that's gonna be who you are. You're still gonna strive

and set goals for yourself and try to reach them, always. It's part of all those years of training, I guess. Well, not just training, but the environment that you're in, that's your make-up. That's how you gain satisfaction, setting your goals and reaching them, or continually striving and working hard towards something. It makes your clock tick, I guess.

As participants reflected on this need to pursue the next challenge, a set of characteristics emerged which, whether innate or acquired, seem to define the elite athlete. Although elite sport had been taken away, these characteristics are still very much a part of each individual:

P1: Yeah, I think I've always, kinda, ... part of my identity is my work ethic, how I do things. Revert back to hockey, once we hit the ice it was leadership by example. You know, just give 100%, 110%, day in day out, no matter what. As a player, on the ice that's how I define myself is through hard work.

P2: I got upset the other day with a client. He was making a bad investment decision and I couldn't convince him otherwise and it just bugged me. It kept me awake for about two nights. Anyways, that's just me. I do have some passion for what I do. It helps you be good at it, you know. If you're caring about it, if you get into it, then you're gonna find the different ways of doing it better and you're always trying to find more information in order to do the job as it should be done.
... I've never been good at identifying a finish line. I just keep pushing myself. As soon as I get there, I move the finish line further away. I can't see getting to a point where I say "Yeah. I'm done."
... You've got to be kind of focused. I think that's why you do see a lot of former athletes, they do well in business because if they can find something that they enjoy doing that they have a particular talent for, it's that focus that really carries them

through. It ensures their success. They don't give up on things, whether that's by design or by accident, it's just a personality trait. They're just successful people, whether they're in athletics or business or whatever.

... The type of person that you are that made you the athlete, and it comes back to that trait, will still make you successful in providing value to your community and yourself and your family. They're the same traits. You just have to realize it. And that's where my challenge has been in moving that foundation.

Throughout their athletic careers, athletes place great emphasis on setting and pursuing goals. This same emphasis can be an asset well after the athletic career is over:

P3: Every day I come to this rink, I try to set a high goal for myself. Every day. I set goals that I try to talk to these kids about something every day, each individually, and I usually reach them every day, and it's great. I leave here every day with a smile on my face. And it's amazing how much fun you can have when you love doing something.

P4: (Participant's name) is a young guy who is very ambitious, is quite dedicated, committed to achieving goals that are usually set up pretty high. And I'm looking to fulfill my life and that fulfillment will come by sort of reaching all the goals and objectives that I've had, and the new ones that I'm always making. I'm constantly making new goals and challenges. (Name) is a guy who will always continue to do that. I don't think I'll ever be content. I don't think any of us will be. But (name), for sure, is always looking for the next level, whether it's the next field level to graduate to, whether it's going from college to the pros, or going from being successful to being more successful.

A new pursuit can fill provide a forum for competence development as well as opportunities for enjoyment:

> P2: I take pride in doing something and doing it well. I've always wanted to be self-sufficient some day. I want to try to build toward that. And I take pride in working toward that goal.

> P3: So I mean, there were a bunch of things that I turned to outside of hockey that helped me get past it. Looked into different areas where I would concentrate my efforts and get my enjoyment from.
> ... Right now, now that I'm a head coach there's a little more pressure on me. You know, because now I'm the fall guy. But if I didn't want that pressure, I wouldn't have taken the job. But oh yeah, I'm just as happy now as I was when I played and maybe even happier. It's fun. Life's too short for you not to have fun with everything. Whether you're losing or whether you're winning or, you know, just anything. As long as you're learning and having fun, I think anybody would be satisfied.

Perhaps most importantly, the new challenge should be consistent with the individual's values, providing a personal mission or purpose, rather than simply filling the need to strive:

> P3: And I knew all along that I wanted to stay in the hockey business and I knew that I had some contacts in it. And I sort of used them. And right now, to this day, I love coming to the rink every day, because I think I can make a difference in all these kids lives in some way or the other, not just on the ice, maybe sometimes off the ice.

... People asked me that question since I started coaching. How long do I think it would take for me to get to the NHL? And I tell them, I don't want to go there. That is absolutely not a goal for me. A goal for me is to stay at this level with these kids because I told myself when I retired that if I was going to stay in the business, I was going to help these kids. And in the NHL, you don't help anybody. It's a business and you're looking out for yourself to make money for your family. Here, you're trying to help these kids get to another level personally and career-wise too. Hockey-wise or career-wise in another area. And I don't want to go any higher than this. People think I'm crazy when I tell them that. They say "what are you talking about?" I say "hey, I want to help these kids and I want to stay at this level". Like, money is essential to everybody, but these kids are more important to me than money. And that's the way I have to look at things, everyday.

... Another reason why I do this too, is like I told you before, ... if some of these kids don't make it past here, as long as they've learned something about life, that I've maybe given them or rubbed off on them, then I'm satisfied. There aren't too many bad kids in there, and if they are, they usually just need a little direction to help them out and that's about it.

P4: I would never want to be remembered as just another person. I'd like to know that people respect me as someone, it's a good compliment when I see someone and they say to me "I always knew you were gonna be someone or something", a big compliment. And a lot of our friends have said that to me over the years and it's a big compliment. But I always wanted to be more than a good football player. I wanted to be a good guy. I wanted to have people respect me. I wanted to give to the community. I want to help. I want to do a lot of good things, but ah ... I haven't done them. I've done some of them, but I definitely want to be a good person. I want to be a role model. I want people to say "he's a good person". In

the business I'm in, people don't say that a lot. Because it's cut-throat. That can be difficult, because the satisfaction about what I want and what I'm about, I don't necessarily get at my business. So it kind of makes it difficult.

P2: You do have to find the passion or challenge that will give you satisfaction. Otherwise, you're not gonna go for it. You won't go for it for very long anyway. You won't go for it with any true passion. It's a challenge but is it a passion? If you really like it and really want it, then it becomes a passion.

This mission can also embody the lifestyle to which the former athlete aspires:

P4: There's a certain thing about an athlete who is successful that makes him shine, because he's healthy, he's happy. And I think that's what we all aspire for is that well-being of life, you always have to be disciplined. Because it's easy to kind of give up and lose yourself, lose your body, lose your discipline. You know, start eating junk food and not care anymore. Because you don't have to but I think that's a mistake. You really have to be really disciplined, more disciplined, and move forward and find that new challenge. And, I hope I've found it. But you know, I think I've found it in certain ways but I still have a lot of things to do before I'll ever feel satisfied.

Further Findings

Prognosis For Life Satisfaction

In the literature review, it was noted that having a career-ending injury was a significant predictor of lower life satisfaction (Klieber et. al., 1987). It is tempting to conclude that this experience necessarily predisposes an individual to this fate. However,

comments made by the participants in this study seem to indicate that this is not necessarily the case. And perhaps more importantly, the adaptive responses and mindset may empower the athlete to take control over his subsequent life satisfaction:

> P3: It wasn't that tough of an adjustment, which is ... you know, I thank God for that, I mean like (expletive), it was smooth. I mean, I don't know how many other people would have a smooth transition other than I said that one month was tough, and after that it was kind of, life goes on and business as usual and things pop up when you decided do you want to do this?

> P1: Once you start realizing each one of those (competence, affiliation, physicality, and fulfillment), I mean, there's no set amount or order that they come in, but it seems like as you start realizing these, they help you kind of regain your sense of self and realize that you're still the same person you are, you just don't necessarily play the same sport.
> *Interviewer: So by fulfilling these conditions, or refilling these conditions, that's what can allow you to move forward?*
> Yeah, by realizing them or redefining them, you kind of realize that you can go on, like this is not the end. It's the start of a new beginning in a sense.

> P4: You know, I think as student athletes, we had school and our studies, we had the fun, we had the social scene, and we had the training and competing. So those are some big things missing. Recently, I've been starting to get some of those things back in my life, started training regularly. That's a big part of making me happy.

But the process is neither easy nor quick. Patience may be the key to achieving self-acceptance after elite sport has been lost:

P2: I have to get comfortable with this. I'm still getting comfortable with learning how to be comfortable with my new basis for self-esteem. Whereas before, it was completely based on this other thing. Now it's a completely new foundation. So you just don't snap that on, you know.

Advice To Others

Participants were given an opportunity to articulate what advice they might provide to an athlete who has just sustained a career-ending injury:

P1: I don't know if there's a universal piece of advice that I'd give. It would depend if I knew the person or not. If the person I knew was kind of a generous person or giving person, I'd say there are going to be other places where you can give what you have to give, not necessarily from an individual stand point with regards to your own development but you can get a lot of enjoyment from working with other people and giving back some of the advice or the time that people gave to you. And I'd be honest, I'd say it's going to be pretty depressing and pretty hellish for... it might be two weeks, a month, six months, until you learn to really accept what's happened to you, to put that in perspective in regards to all the other good things that are in your life, and they're going to be the same, those things aren't going to change, they might even improve. It's not easy by any stretch, I don't think. You kind of lose that one part of your identity for sure. It's takes a while, and you'll never get it back but your identity can be changed or even improved by taking on other projects like an outreach program or coaching kids or anything like that, or even your school or a relationship or it could be anything, I guess. Whatever is fulfilling for that person.

P2: Well, obviously, it's just the end of 'a' career. It's not the end of your life. You as an individual are more than what you did. You had an activity that, maybe you were really good at, but it's not all you are. It's not all you are because you wouldn't have been able to get to a particularly high level if you didn't have a lot of other skills. I speak of that obsessive compulsive thing, you want that trait to be able to focus or to get a little obsessive, even though the medical end, you can go too far to that end. But if you're able to get that focused on something, those are excellent traits to have because now you can go after something. Whenever you decide what it is, that's okay if you don't know right away, but if you just keep trying a bunch of things, as soon as you've found out what it is, you've proven to yourself that you have an ability to focus and work your ass off, to work. Not everybody has that skill. You've got it. It's in you. So when ever you find it, you turn on the jets and away you go.

P4: I think you'd tell him a lot of the things we talked about. You say look, you have to find that new thing in your life, that new challenge, that allows you to control that great strength and determination and commitment that you had for your passion, being an athlete. And you've got to find a new goal, a new challenge. And you really, you have to think about all the good things that you did, along with the reasons you liked it. And you've got to look to what can give you that excitement? What can give you that pleasure? What can give you that feeling? And it's out there, because there are so many things you can do.

P3: I guess the only advice I could give is don't let this slow you down. Everybody's got more than one thing that they want to do. That's a true fact. So don't let your injury slow you down if it doesn't have to. I mean, you've got to keep going. No matter what you do or no matter what you find, as devastating as it is, sooner or later you've got to snap out of it and get going and doing

something that you either want to do or like to do or that you have to do, I guess, to earn money or whatever. Don't sit around very long. I guess that's the biggest piece of advice that I could give. Without knowing anybody, I guess as a general piece of advice, get going. Don't sit around. I guess that's the biggest thing is don't let your feet drag. Get going in something right away.

Chapter 5:

Discussion and Implications of the Findings

The implications of this study follow directly from the question it was designed to address: How can an athlete who has sustained a career-ending injury achieve healthy adjustment? The model outlined in the results section (see Figure 4) highlights the various factors that were crucial to the adjustment of the participants of this study.

The down period plays a functional role for the injured athlete. During this period, the energy levels of the individual drops. For a time, the individual is preoccupied with the loss, minimizing his regular activities. At this time, the athlete is able to come to terms with the significance of the loss. Factors contributing to this significance include identity (How much of my identity depends on sport?), previous coping tendencies (Am I capable of dealing with this?), and thematic issues (What have I lost in terms of feelings of competence, affiliation, physicality, and fulfillment?).

The ability to progress through this stage seems to rest on certain coping resources. *Social support* can facilitate this process in a few key ways. First, in light of this major threat to the identity and lifestyle of the athlete, providing some consistency with respect to positive regard can assure the athlete that the relationships of central importance (parents, spouse/partner, friends) will be preserved despite the retirement from sport.

Secondly, the athlete may simply need to talk or cry out some of the loss. By allowing the athlete to express these feelings, the athlete can get his head around the significance of what has happened. It was clear that sympathy was not a strategy that was

favoured by the athletes. This is understandable and consistent with counselling literature which suggests that sympathy focuses the individual on the negatives and prescribes (or perpetuates) a negative affective response (Egan, 1990).

Thirdly, it is quite understandable that while faced with a loss of this magnitude, the athlete may have difficulty placing it within a broader context. The athlete may initially tend to see the best years of his life and his best qualities as being taken away. Other positive aspects of his life and strengths as a person may well be ignored or discounted. Those supporters of each athlete can remind the athlete of these things and counter irrational statements about the hopelessness that follows.

In addition, encouragement can also be provided that will foster hope for full recovery and optimism about the future. These functions of the social support are also outlined by Ford and Gordon (1993) as well as Grove, Lavallee, and Gordon (1998). The findings of this study lend credence to their recommendations of emotional support and emotional challenge (outlined in the literature review).

The utility of a counsellor or sport psychologist in this process was expressed by the participants. This may be recommended as counsellors/sport psychologists are trained to be sensitive to the needs of an individual dealing with loss. They can provide the necessary direction and facilitation required to progress through this process. In addition, participants expressed their reluctance to "bring everybody down" and a helping professional has sufficient distance that this should not be an issue.

A coping resource which has received little attention but is arguably of even greater value is one's internal coping skills. If the athlete is able to create an adaptive mindset or philosophy, this can be tremendously empowering in terms of dealing with the loss and transition. Some common characteristics of such a mindset are identifiable from the results. Not unlike the support of most value from key family and friends, an athlete can deal constructively with the loss by consciously putting it in perspective, looking forward, and focusing on positives. Some of the participants maintained that it was absolutely crucial that they not entertain thoughts of 'what if this hadn't happened?'. The

participants were even able to view the experience as integral to their development of resilience and strength for the rest of their lives. The belief that the injury happened for a reason (based on religious faith or otherwise) was also of value. Whether these types of foci must be in place well prior to injury or whether they can be developed in response to the injury is not certain. The participants of this study all seemed to have their personal philosophies in place prior to their injuries (i.e., way of looking at injury was consistent with previous experiences of adversity). But arguably, this quality of resilience is common to most elite athletes, allowing them to deal with adversity while competing. However, research with the skill of self-talk would suggest that the development of adaptive cognitions is possible through a systematic approach (Gauron, 1986). If this is the case, effective coping can be placed directly in the hands of the athlete by providing these appropriate areas of focus.

What makes this model (Figure 4) unique is its direct applicability to the career-ending athletic injury. The other models of psychological response to injury (described in the literature review) have been applied to this context but provide no specific insight into the nature of the loss. By identifying the four thematic areas of competence, affiliation, physicality, and fulfillment, one can now understand the pieces that have been lost rather than simply referring to a general loss of 'the sport' or one's identity. While the significance of each of these factors will vary from individual to individual, the components held true for all of the participants in this study. As such, they also provide direction in terms of refilling the voids that the injury has left. Athletes can now be provided with four key factors in need of their attention if life without elite sport is to be as rewarding as life with it.

Consideration of these factors also illustrates the dynamic nature of adjustment. Clearly, the factors and how they are perceived will vary across time and situation. With this in mind, the adjustment process should not be viewed as 'complete' or a final destination, but rather these needs will require attention likely for the remainder of the athlete's life. For example, feelings of competence will vary from day to day based on

different events. A high achievement in business may make the loss of elite sport seem of less consequence, but a failure within that same environment may amplify these feelings of loss. One should therefore take ongoing steps to develop confidence and self-worth within some new context(s).

Recognizing the athlete's need to pursue some new passion or challenge provides an additional value of this model. Whether innate or acquired, the elite athlete seems to have a need to strive and achieve. He/she is also equipped with characteristics that make this possible. Assuming that the loss of sport will mark the termination of this trait would be inappropriate. If the athletes can recognize this tendency within themselves, they may have the impetus to get back on their feet. In addition, the individual may obtain an appropriate focus through which competence, affiliation, fulfillment (and possibly physicality) can be redeveloped or even uncovered. While participants agreed that one need not rush to find this new direction, they all encouraged an openness to new things, a faith that 'that something' lies out there somewhere, and an insistence that this new direction can ultimately provide salvation from the dispair of exit from sport.

This model of healthy adjustment contrasts the Kubler-Ross model which identifies a sequence of grieving stages and offers no vision of direction following this grieving. As noted in the literature review, the Kubler-Ross model lacks validation within a sport injury context. While this model has been a useful tool when applied to the terminally ill, the findings of this study indicate fundamental differences between the termination of sport career and termination of life. The model of healthy adjustment provides insight into the rebuilding process that this context demands since, in the words of one participant: "there is a whole lot more living to do."

The model also specifically identifies those issues of primary significance to the athlete exiting sport. The information processing model and affective cycle of injury provide a framework for understanding this phenomenon but fail to fill in the gaps in terms of specifically what the injured athlete is struggling with. It should be noted, however, that this model has yet to be tested empirically so its findings may not be transferable to all

athletes who have sustained a career-ending injury, and further themes may be identified. But having said that, the model was seen by each participant as remarkably reflective of his experience.

The findings of this study are perhaps most consistent with those of Grove et al. (1998). Grove and colleagues emphasized the importance of working through the loss of sport through confiding with someone that the individual trusts. The role of social support, particularly during the down period when the athlete is coming to terms with the loss, was identified as being important to the participants in this study. Grove et al. also identified certain issues of psychological distress (see literature review) which correspond with those thematic issues identified in this study, including an outlet for time and energy (new passion or challenge), loss of social environment (affiliation), loss of self-image and feelings of accomplishment (feelings of competence), and loss of a source of joy and absorption (fulfillment). The model of healthy adjustment adds the importance of physicality, an issue which is of additional relevance for the injured athlete, but likely one that is of some importance for any retiring athlete.

Reflections of the Researcher

As mentioned in chapter 3, I sustained a career-ending athletic injury. The context was difficult in that I was still quite young and at the beginning of what I felt could be a lengthy and successful football career. At the beginning of my second year of university football, I sustained a neck injury which everyone but myself maintained was surely career-ending. Unlike the participants of this study, the process of my adjustment was both long and difficult.

I was unwilling to accept the end of my football career for a few years. I kept my feelings to myself for the most part, but unlike the participants in this study, my mindset was not conducive to looking forward or avoiding thoughts of 'what if'. I felt unable to define myself without my sport. I ignored my academic and personal abilities. I struggled

with the loss of my primary social unit. I felt that nothing could match the thrill of the game that I had fallen in love with as a child. And for a long time, I was reluctant to take on any new pursuit with anything resembling 'whole-heartedness'.

When I look back now at my emotional response which easily classifies as clinically significant, I am able to see the factors that were stacked against me. What also strikes me, however, is a sense that my adjustment may not have been as difficult had I been given the guidance that I now feel qualified to provide. Had I been able to hear the words that I have only recently transcribed and analyzed, I may have found the wisdom to deal more constructively with the event. I would likely have felt less alone and more understood, for I felt that no one could possibly fathom what I was going through. And had I exercised some of the principles that have been brought to light in this study, I am confident that my adjustment would have been both accelerated and less painful (or at least less devoid of hope).

The phenomenon of career-ending injury is not uncommon. However, the sensation of this loss can be a remarkably lonely one. What is perhaps most striking about my own experience was the presence of loving family and friends who would have gladly provided the support that I needed. However, perhaps because I hid my needs, and perhaps because they were not aware of what I needed, I went at the process more or less alone. I now contend that it is the responsibility of the athlete, the family, the friends, the coaches, the teammates, and the physicians to gain some sensitivity to this issue. Perhaps a counsellor or sport psychologist can provide the necessary education. He/she might also provide appropriate remediation and guidance. But clearly someone must help the athlete who has sustained such an injury that help is available.

Fortunately, I have managed to rebuild the foundation represented within the model. Over time, I have gained confidence in several areas, I have many different friends and affiliations, I am still very active, and I have found countless pursuits and activities that are rewarding, thrilling, and enjoyable. I can see within these factors the components that complete my identity and provide fulfillment. My direction of choice, the

helping profession (specifically in sport), represents a new passion and challenge. And it is no accident that my interests have been drawn to this area. My injury brought to my attention one of many problematic issues for athletes on which my academic pursuits are now focused. Shane Gould Innes, a former Olympic swimmer, found that she was ultimately able to achieve a sense of closure and complete her identity change through what Grove et al. (1998) termed *generativity*. This term represents a feeling that positive outcomes have come out of one's expression of his/her experience. She has gone on to talk about her retirement experiences with other athletes. (It should be noted, however, that this unaided process took approximately 25 years!) Similarly, I have achieved, from my research, a sense of closure. I feel that I have identified the key areas that can allow an athlete to cope constructively with this experience. Perhaps more importantly for me, I have acquired a greater understanding of my own struggle. Thus, my injury is now part of a cumulation of experiences that made me who I am. I have achieved my own level of generativity.

My interaction with the participants was very positive and they seemed able to disclose their stories and feel understood. The question might arise, based on research design, whether I obtained what results I did simply because I was looking for them. However, the participants were all given a chance to comment on the model and whether it rang true for them. Agreement was unanimous. That the model was seen by each participant as reflective of his experience is taken as a positive indicator of credibility of analysis.

The issue of responsibility is a contentious one. Professional sport organizations and other elite sport institutions traditionally focus on those individuals who will generate the greatest 'returns'. For this reason, the injured athlete is prone to feeling forgotten or neglected. Indeed, elite sport is often described as a tough 'business' and the damaged commodity is generally discarded and forgotten. However, as responsible professionals (if not business people) we must consider the world that an injured elite athlete must enter. After sacrificing themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally, in exchange for our

adoration and price of a ticket, these individuals must reconceptualize themselves and their place in the world. The model developed in this study represents a guidance tool by which athletes can rediscover meaning and self-worth. The necessary next step is a sport executive willing to provide the resources necessary to make this guidance available. It is not a question of dollars and cents; it is one of moral responsibility.

Future Directions

As noted by Sinclair and Orlick (1993), programs to assist athletes in transition need to be developed, refined, and delivered to high caliber athletes. By virtue of the conditions through which injured athletes leave sport, this group deserves special attention. Interventions should take into consideration all of the components of the model to facilitate all pressing issues of this adjustment. In addition to the availability of seminars and support groups for the athlete, key individuals (family, friends, coaches, teammates) need to be aware of and sensitive to the issues that these athletes must face. Furthermore, consideration of these findings are of particular relevance to the sport psychologist or counselling professional who may be asked to assist athletes in dealing with this experience.

As useful as the Schlossberg model (1995) may be as a framework for transition, further qualitative studies of this nature might help to identify the specific issues which are of importance to different transitions or losses. For example, military personnel who retire may very well lose important aspects of identity, routine, competence, affiliation, and collective vision. By identifying the nature of the loss, the coping resources, and the post-retirement opportunities, this transition may be less turbulent for retiring military personnel and their families.

However, this qualitative exploration of the career-ending injury experience is based on only a few athletes. In order to transfer these findings to all athletes who sustain such injuries, the model should be tested empirically, with athletes of both genders, as well

as different sports (contact/non-contact, team/individual), ages, and levels (amateur/professional, elite/novice). Further depth of understanding with respect to stages of this experience might best be acquired through a longitudinal study which would document the adjustment process from time of injury right through to years after.

Future research might also investigate the efficacy of current interventions designed to assist in career transition. This could include both seminar and resource opportunities such as those available through the Olympic Athlete Career Center (OACC). Counselling interventions might also be evaluated for their efficacy in facilitating expression of affect, effective coping, and pursuit of future directions.

Implications

The current study has useful implications for the injured athlete. By taking some key steps, the individual can be empowered to make a healthy adjustment to this loss (See Table 2).

Table 2: Implications for the injured athlete.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE INJURED ATHLETE
• It is normal and healthy to experience a period of sadness following a career-ending injury. Take some time to come to terms with what has happened. It will help you to move forward when you're ready.
• Talk about it. It can be beneficial to express your feelings to someone that you trust.
• Identify those people who can provide support and encouragement in coping with your injury.
• Put it in perspective. Consider your injury within a broad picture. Identify the other positive aspects of your life that will not be affected.
• Focus on the future. You cannot change the past. Direct your time and energy to those things you can control. Consider all the possibilities for future pursuits.
Cont'd

- Identify key interests or pursuits in which you have some ability or are willing to develop it. Acknowledge that you have many traits that made you successful in sport that can help you to achieve outside of it.

- Surround yourself with people with whom you share common interests, values, and qualities. Identify those people that hold you in high esteem regardless of your sporting exploits. Consider involvement with an alumni organization.

- Stay active. Physical activity has always been a large part of your life. Find activities that will allow you to maintain some level of fitness and physical enjoyment.

- Be open to new pursuits and leisure activities. There are many ways to find fulfillment if you are willing to find them. Consider also those things that gave you a pleasant break from competition while you were competing.

- Consider activities in which you can help others to develop and achieve. A great deal of satisfaction can come out of such opportunities.

- Have faith that with a positive focus, life after competitive sport can be as rewarding as life with it. "There's a whole lot of living left to do" (participant of this study)

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Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview

The Injury

Describe your injury and how it happened.

Were you physically unable to resume your career or was the decision to stop competing due to risk of further injury?

At what stage were you in your career?

Did the injury leave you with 'unfinished business'?

How old were you when the injury occurred?

Prior to your injury, what sport-related goals and dreams did you have?

The Aftermath

Describe your emotional response following the injury? (right at the time, next day, week, month, etc.)

Did your emotional response go through different stages/phases?

At what point did it become clear that your athletic career was over?

What was your emotional response at this point?

How did you express your emotions?

How did your emotions affect your behaviour? (isolate self, alcohol, drugs, displaced anger, etc.)

What were the dominant thoughts following your injury? (positive/negative, rational/irrational) (at all stages of response)

What role did significant others play in your recovery? Who was helpful? Who made the process more difficult?

What effects did physicians and physiotherapists have?

Were you willing to discuss your injury and its implications with anyone? With whom?

Describe the effects of the injury (both positive and negative) on your relationships with others (teammates, coaches, parents, friends, etc.).

Did you receive any counselling? Was it helpful? What form did it take?

To what extent did the injury affect your participation in other sports, activities, and exercising?

Has your body-image changed?

Was there chronic pain following the injury? (How severe?) Does it still affect you?

Identity

How did you see yourself prior to the injury? Who were you?

What was your place in the world?

Describe the meaning of your participation in sport? What were your motives?

What did the loss of competitive sport mean to you?

How important was 'being an athlete' to your identity?

How important was sport while you were growing up?

Were there other important aspects of your identity outside of athletics? (Roles)

Did your perception of 'who you are' change following your injury? How?

Were you willing to change your identity following your injury?

At what point? What allowed you to do this? (catalyst)

Did you feel confused or unsure about your roles following injury?

Did you see yourself less favorably following injury?

How has your self-image changed from your injury until now?

Has your identity gone through different phases?

Are you content with who you are now? Why or why not?

To what extent do you define yourself by roles? Characteristics? Performances?

Do you think your self-concept will change in the future? How?

Coping Strategies

What did you do to cope with the trauma of injury?

What do you do to cope with your problems?

Have you done different things at different stages? Explain.

To what extent have you employed each of the following in coping with your injury:

Just accepting the consequences of your injury

Reframing the injury in a positive light

Planning new activities or your future

Denial or distracting yourself from the reality of your injury

Seeking emotional support (Talking it out)

Focusing on and venting your emotions

Avoiding competitive activities

Looked for support/help in moving on (career planning, other interests, etc.)

Keeping busy with other things

Humor, joking about the injury

Alcohol/Drug use

Turned to religion

Focused on other pursuits

Future Directions

What directions have you taken since your injury?

What are your new roles?

Are you physically active?

What goals/dreams did you pursue following your injury?

What steps have you taken to reach them?

What are your goals and dreams for the future?

Compare your new goals and lifestyle to those you had as and athlete.

Are your new pursuits as fulfilling as sport? Explain.

What people/relationships influenced your current career, interests, and activities? Explain.

Are you happy/satisfied with your life? Compare this with your time in sport?

What events or circumstances have served as turning points in your life? Why?

Philosophy

What meaning has your injury had in your life?

What can be gained/learned from dealing with adversity?

What have you learned about yourself?

Are you a stronger person from having had the experience?

How should people view injuries/adversity in their lives?

What advice would you offer to another athlete who has sustained a career ending injury?

In retrospect: Would you change the past if you could? Explain.

Loss

Have you had to deal with loss in the past?

How did you cope with it?

Did your previous losses affect your approach to this experience? How?